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THE FRENCH HUMOURISTS.

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PREFACE.

THE table of contents of this volume would seem to be a sufficient preface. I have selected those whom I consider representative writers, many of them hitherto almost unknown to the English reader, though not to the student of French literature, out of every century from the twelfth downwards. The humourists of the fifteenth century alone will be found unrepresented here, unless Rabelais, who belongs to it by birth, be claimed for it. The reason of this omission, as stated in the first chapter, is simply that I have in my previous work on early French poetry discussed all those of that century who could come within my limits. For the same reason Clément Marot is absent from this volume. No apology is needed for the omission from a single volume, covering so large a space of time as this, of Voltaire.

I trust the book will be found acceptable to those who like, as I do, to know as much as possible about their authors, and to connect their writings with the conditions of their lives and the literary atmosphere

they breathed. I have given in translation most of the pieces taken to show the character and genius of my authors. The greater number are translated for the first time, I trust without too much detriment to the originals. The whimsical poem of Ver-Vert is given nearly in full.

Two or three of these studies have, in somewhat different forms, already appeared. I have to express my best thanks to the editor of the "British Quarterly," for permission to reproduce as much as I thought fit of a paper on the "Romance of the Rose;" to the editor of "Macmillan's Magazine," for a similar permission concerning a paper on Rabelais; and to the editor of "Temple Bar," for permission to use again what I pleased of papers on Molière, La Fontaine, and Scarron.

I do not like to allow this volume to go forth without also expressing my obligations to my friend Mr. S. Lee, of my own college and Lincoln's Inn, for many valuable critical suggestions.

W. B.

Savile Club,
Sep. 1, 1873.

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THE FRENCH HUMOURISTS.

Chapter I.

THE CHANSON.

Mieulx est de rire que de larmes escripre, pour ce que rire est le propre de l'homme.—Rabelais.

THE most elementary form of joke is the discomfiture of an enemy:—discomfiture, at first, meaning death. But there are other kinds of rivalries besides those which involve mortal combat. In these, discomfiture means defeat. Advancing farther, we arrive at our modern point of laughing chiefly at those little incidents in social life which mean temporary uneasiness, awkwardness, slight mental trouble. Perhaps, as civilization gets on, mankind will learn so much sympathy as not even to laugh at these. Laughter, however, is in its nature the expression of relief from anxiety, of surprise, or of self-congratulation. It is in any form a sort of triumphant crow of victory, and as such will go on, let us hope, for ever. Satire, on the other hand, of which humour is a branch, is the weapon of the weak

It is an acknowledgment of helplessness. In times of oppression it is the boldest and most outspoken; it languishes when laws become strong and men grow mild; it is lethargic in times of freedom.

Therefore, in rough and rude centuries, in times when all the world is fighting, and life is much more uncertain than nature ever intended, we may expect to find the keenest and most bitter satire.

> Il faut bien que l'esprit venge
> L'honnête homme qui n'a rien.

We do so find satire, making allowance for imperfect powers of expression. So far as men can speak, they speak strongly; mostly they cannot frame their thoughts at all, except for the ordinary purposes of life. To help out their meagre forms of speech, they take what songs and phrases they can get from others, and use them.

We have to do with that people, *gens summæ solertiæ*, who first broke through the blackness of the Middle Ages, and learned how to speak, write, and sing; with the country from which all great ideas of modern times have sprung, where men have ever had the courage of their opinions, whose sons are quick to comprehend, eager to realize, tenacious of a truth. France was first in the field of modern literature. She it was who changed the Latin for the vernacular; her people first taught, and have always gone on teaching, the equality of man. She began the reformation of religion it was she who most kept alive the fire of learning, and most helped the long, slow development of the *Renaissance*. To her belong the great majority of mediæval poets;—England has only one, Italy has four. She possesses the most glorious list, till the more sluggish blood of England is roused, of writers, scholars and philosophers. Hers is the longest martyr roll of heretics.

Frenchmen have nowhere shown their character more than in their satire. They are fond of calling it the *esprit gaulois*, tracing back the vein of gaiety, light heart, and keen perception to those old ancestors who, after all, have left them but little of their blood, divided as it is among Romans, Franks, and Normans. It is a vein which is quite peculiar to France. "It has not," says a recent writer, "any tincture of hatred or violence. We do not find in it the overwhelming gaiety of Aristophanes, the exaggerated indignation of Juvenal, the dry and bitter laugh of Don Juan; but malice wrapped up in bonhomie, the irony of Rabelais and La Fontaine, the grumbling and good-natured tone of a Picard peasant." I want to show as we go along that the French type for satire and humour has preserved one uniform character from generation to generation. In an unbroken line the writers are all the same. The poets of the chansons and the parodies, Guyot the Grumbler, Rutebeuf the Trouvère, Villon the Ribaut, Clement Marot, Rabelais, Passerat and Pithou, Saint-Amant, La Fontaine—all down to Béranger, have one quality in common, the *esprit gaulois*. They are always good-tempered; their darts are wrapped in flowers; their poison—a harmless poison enough—is administered in wine; they are too sympathetic to be savage; they never get into a rage, except perhaps when, like poor Des Périers, they are going to commit suicide; or when, like Rabelais, who *is* savage with the monks, they have deep and bitter wrongs to resent. On the other hand, they are irreverent; they have no strong convictions; they are incapable of martyrdom; they are full of animal spirits and animal enjoyment; they love life with all the passion of a Greek; they are like children for mockery, mischief, and lightness of heart.

I cannot make my gallery complete, for two reasons. First, because there are, since the days of Mademoiselle de Scudéry, limits to every volume; and, secondly, because I have already, in a previous volume, written all that I found to write about my very dear and especial friends, François Villon and Clement Marot, to say nothing of those careless rascals, Coquillart, Roger de Collerye, and Olivier Basselin.[1]

My limits are large—too large for my space, perhaps too large for my strength. They stretch from the eleventh to the nineteenth century. Perforce there is many a name omitted—many a writer whose claims are at least equal to some of those in these pages—notably, you will not find here either Voltaire or Rousseau. But let me lead you by the hand through ways perhaps untrodden, among fields yet unvisited by you; and after

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[1] About Marot, however, I have this to say:—Professor Henry Morley has written a life of him. I have a great respect for Mr. Morley's two big volumes on English literature—the respect one conceives for laborious and honest work. At the same time, I protest against his Marot. The life contains not a single fact that is new, and of the opinions very little, speaking from my own knowledge of the period, which is true. For of all things under the sun, Marot was not a religious reformer. I cannot, as I could wish, reprint what I have already written on the subject, but I refer my readers to the chapter in this work on Rabelais, where they will find, not Marot's opinions—for the poor man had none—but the opinions of the men who were his friends and associates. If there be any further doubt as to his character—it is really an important point, as it affects the greatest poet, in some points, that France ever had—I submit the following lines, as showing what his own contemporary, Beza—a religionist if you like—thought of him:—

"Tam docte Venerem divinus pinxit Apelles,
Illi ut credatur visa fuisse Venus;
At tantam sapiunt Venerem tua scripta, Marote,
Ut tibi credatur cognita tota Venus."

And surely there could be no better judge of such matters than the author of the *Juvenilia*.

introducing you to humourists of that dark time when Boileau thought there was no literature—"rien n'est agréable," said Sainte-Beuve; "qu'un guide familier dans un pays inconnu"—let me try to throw fresh light on men whose names are already familiar, and make, if it may be, their dry bones live.

In the examination of the older authors, there has been no turning over of yellow parchments, no decipherment of faded manuscripts. That work has been done for us by true and faithful Frenchmen, loyal to their own literature. Of all the literature of the Middle Ages, the best, the choicest, has been already published, and though much yet remains, the work is practically done. We who see how, to the shame and disgrace of our rich men, the work of publishing our ancient texts is left to one poor society—chiefly to two or three zealous men toiling against every kind of discouragement—may well confess that France, the forerunner in modern literature, is also the most careful to preserve her early glories.

The history of French mediæval satire is the history of mediæval literature and art. Satire is everywhere; it lies in every line of the fabliau, in every sentence of the conte; the minstrel carries it from place to place; the charlatan shouts it at fair-time from his stage; it forms part of every popular amusement; it lurks in the corner of the illuminated manuscript; it grins at us from some dark place in the cathedral. Side by side with the solemn service of the church is the parody, with its ass, its boy bishop, its liturgy in praise of wine. Beside the crimson cavalcade of ladies and knights is the procession of Renard and Isengrin. After the monks and priests, chanting their psalms, comes, telling his beads like them, the Devil; while along with every amusement, joy, and pleasure of life, a part of laughter, an

echo of the song, a guest at the feast, a leader of the dance, a follower of the march, a fiddler in the band, the companion of king, knight, bourgeois and peasant, sneering at all, laughing at all, mocking at all, is the Mephistophelian Death of the Danse Macabre.

From the eleventh to the fifteenth century it is a sort of long procession of satire. First, as is but right, we have the music, which is provided by the troubadours and *trouvères;* they lead off the band of those who laugh at everything and try to improve nothing. The scholars come next, then the clergy, then the men of the robe, then a general breakdown dance of all together, and the old things fall to pieces, giving place to the new.

Towards the end of the eleventh century we hear a confused roar as of hungry wild animals. It is the voice, no longer to be suppressed, of the people. They rise in Laon, slaughter the bishop, burn the palaces, establish their commune—are put down and punished. They rise in Normandy, armed with pitchforks and sticks. They are easily dispersed by steel-clad men-at-arms, and ordered back to their cottages with feet and hands cut off. The *trouvère* has preserved their song. "We are men," it begins, with a grand and solemn simplicity, "we are men even as they are; such limbs as they have we have; as great bodies have we; and we can endure as much. Nothing fails us but heart alone. Let us ally ourselves by oath. Let us defend our own and ourselves. Let us keep ourselves together, and if they wish to fight, we have against one knight thirty or forty peasants, vigorous and strong to fight."[1]

[1] Nos sumes homes cum il sunt,
Tex membres avum cum il unt,

It is the first of the terrible French risings. They will try again and again, with the Pastoureaux, with the Jacquerie, each time with the same song. For the heritage of the Gaul, who used to divide his land afresh every five years, is the irrepressible sense of equality.

With the eleventh century comes the first outward mark visible to us of the great changes coming over Europe. The laity are beginning to ask questions; the bourgeois are already struggling for the municipal interests; the clergy are handing over to lay hands the art of architecture; the universities are taking learning out of the convents; Abélard teaches his thousands; Bernard complains that the faith of the simple is divided, and the very secrets of Heaven are searched into. To meet the growing strength of enquiry the church invents the mendicant orders; the men of the law grow stronger; the royal power deepens and broadens; men doubt and deny; all foreshadows the great convulsion of the sixteenth century—the first of those by which men will at last destroy their greatest and most accursed enemy, the spirit of sacerdotalism.

At the end of the eleventh century, another captive, besides architecture and scholarship, escapes from the cloister and finds her way into the world. It is music. For the people begin to sing, not in the tunes of the Church service, but melodies of their own. One can

---

Et altresi grans cors avum,
Et altretant sofrir poum.
Ne nus faut fors cuer sulement,
Alium nus par serement,
Nos aveir et nus defendum,
E tuit ensemble nus tenum.
Es nus voilent guerroier,
Ben avum contre un chevalier
Trente ou quarante païsanz
Maniables e cumbatans.

hardly believe that there could have been actually *no* popular music before that date; it is difficult to understand a silent people; but the fact seems so, and the church service was the only means of giving utterance to the instincts of music. Then came the chanson, set to the viol and the lute, and singing of love and the sweet springtime. It began, after the manner of an escaped prisoner, by being wholly joyous and bright:—

J'ai amiete
Sadete
Blondete
Telz com je voloie.

Presently a sweet melancholy falls upon the soul. The lover has to leave his mistress; he hears the birds sing in Britanny and thinks of their song in sweet Champagne. He is getting old and past the time of love. And just then the chanson is joined by another prisoner from the convent, the "sirvente." The sirvente is the earliest form of satire. It was the imitation of monkish rhymes in the vulgar tongue, beginning with verse half in Latin half in French, and was as great a step in advance as when Regnier first imitated Horace. And then satire open and undisguised went up and down the face of France, striking all, sparing nothing; ridiculing the ladies for their painted faces, the lords for their tyrannies, the Pope for his pride,[1] the clergy for their avarice—knight, lawyer, bourgeois, villain.

There is a singular monotony about the chansons of the Langue d'Oil. They are, as I have said, mostly

[1] Papa captus hunc vel hanc decipit,
Papa quid vult in lectum recipit,
Papa nullum vel nullam excipit,
Papæ detur, nam Papa præcipit:
Tort a qui ne le dune.

tinged with the satirical spirit. Some, however, are purely pastoral. The knight—it is always in May, when the birds begin to sing—rides through the forest and finds a *belle*. The chanson has then two possible endings. Most of the songs are quite simple and pretty. Here is one of the very lightest:—

On a day as it befel
In a wood I rode along;
Lying there, a maiden fair
Watch'd her sheep and sang this song:
Tire lire à lire,
Robin mine;
Pipers come and pipers go,
Tire lire à lire.

I doff'd my hat and bent me low,
And beside her took my seat.
"Maiden, tell me, ere I go,
Why dost thou this song repeat?"
Tire lire, &c.

"Sir," she said, "where'er I hide me;
Robin comes and asks for love;
And as often does he chide me,
Since my heart he cannot move."
Tire lire, &c.

"Ah!" cried I, "but let me woo thee;
Let me clasp this silver thing
Round thy waist, and hold thee to me;
Only, only, cease to sing
Tire lire," &c.

"Sir, 'twere churlish 'No' to say:
Take me now to be your bride.
Let us from this place away,
Together singing, as we ride,
Tire lire à lire,
Robin mine;
Pipers come and pipers go,
Tire lire à lire."

Here, too, is another of a later period, in the same light strain.

It is early in the morning,
At the very break of day,
My love and I go roaming
All in the woods to play.
The dew, like pearl-drops, bathe our feet,
The sweet dew-drops of May.

In the sweetest place of any,
'Mid the grasses thick and high,
Caring nothing for the dew-drops
That around us thickly lie,
Bathed and lapp'd in glittering May-dew,
Sit we there, my love and I.

As we pluck the whitethorn blossom,
As we whisper words of love,
Prattles close beside the brooklet,
Sings the lark and coos the dove.
Our feet are bathed with May-dew,
And our hearts are bathed in love.

A simple tune enough. You may play it on a wheaten straw and on a scrannel pipe, but it will only sound well in the open air, and must be sung when the sun is brightest, the birds are loudest, the flowers are sweetest, and youth is happiest. Under these conditions it may pass for music.

In the next we get the fatal element of illicit passion:—

Sweet Yolante, in her chamber fair,
Bends at her work o'er shuttle and woof;
Here golden threads, and a silk one there;
But her mother chides her in bitter reproof:
"Therefore, I blame thee, fair Yolante!

"Fair Yolante, thy mother am I,
And so may speak as seemeth me good."
"But mother, and mother, pray tell me why?"
"Tell thee I will, as a mother should,
Wherefore I blame thee, my child Yolante."

"But why, then, mother?" she smiling said;
"Is it for work, or is it for play?
Is it for weaving the golden thread,
Or is it for lying in bed all day?
Wherefore chidest thou fair Yolante?"

"It is not for weaving the silk and the gold;
It is not for work, it is not for play;
It is not for sleeping when matins are told;
But for whispering ever your lover gay—
Therefore I chide thee, fair Yolante.

"Whispering, child, with the County Guy;
Whispering, laughing, when no one is near.
Bitterly now doth thy husband sigh:
Speak no more with him, daughter dear—
Therefore I blame thee, fair Yolante."

"And if my husband himself should pray,
And he and his kin all sorrow and sigh,
Little care I, for I must say nay,
And never cease loving my County Guy."
"Therefore I blame thee, fair Yolante."

Or again, there is the pure ballad, taking in some incident of love or death, sorrow or joy. I will take one more as a specimen of the ballad literature of France, which, with a greater wealth of incident, would be the richest in the world:—

Fair Doette, at her window sitting,
Reads in her book with her thoughts astray;
Still from the written page they are flitting
To her lord at the tournament far away.
Now woe is me.

A squire is climbing the stairs of her bower,
Down in the court has he left his steed;
Fair Doette, in the Lady's Tower,
Springs to her feet for news indeed.
Now woe is me.

Cried fair Doette, as he stood at the door,
"Where and how is my love, my lord?"
But she swooned away, and she asked no more,
For the squire he answered her never a word.
Now woe is me.

The Lady Doette has opened her eyes,
And she turns to the squire, but hopes in vain.
Heavy her heart in her bosom lies,
For her lord she never will see again.
Now woe is me.

"Say," said the Lady Doette, "now say
News of my lord, whom I love so well."
"Alas! alas! he was kill'd in the fray;
Fain would I hide it, but needs must tell.
Now woe is me."

'Gan fair Doette to sorrow and moan;
"Ah! liege my lord, and woe befall
The day and the tournay; now must I begone
To take the vows in the convent wall,
(Now woe is me)—
Ever a nun in the Church of St. Paul."

The names of the song-writers are legion. Among the satiric *trouvères*, excepting Rutebeuf, whom you will find further on, note especially Count Thibaut of Champagne, lover of Queen Bertha, a sweet and graceful poet, but monotonous. He has a thing or two to say about the general corruption of the age. We shall hear a good deal before we have finished about the corruption of the age, and if that were the only commonplace, one would not mind. But worse commonplaces are before us. Then there is Hue de la Ferté, whose soul is moved by a mighty wrath against Thibaut himself, as well as against the corruption of the age.

Count Thibaut, with envy gilded,
And with deepest treachery stain'd,
In the noble craft of knighthood
Little credit hast thou gain'd;
Better skill'd art thou, I ween,
In the art of medicine.

Thus politely hinting that the Count was a secret poisoner. In another song he exhorts the young king, Louis IX., to shake off the domination of women and priests:—

Make the clergy go their way,
In the church to sing and pray.

Then comes on our list Adam de la Halle, of whom

a careful study ought to be made. He is a bourgeois of Arras; he is intended for the church, but falls in love with Marie and marries her. Then he sings the beauty of his bride. Ten years later, the artless minstrel, forgetting all the tender things he used to sing—so fickle is the poet's heart—is lamenting the way in which his wife has "gone off" and lost her beauty—the unreasonable husband. He writes about the Crusades, about the mendicant friars, about the town gossip. He has a clear and distinct individuality, pleasant to look back upon, and is of a cheerful, vigorous nature, not above considering the disputes of his own town fit subjects for his verse, as well as the month of May and the everlasting shepherdess sitting beside a fountain.

The first French satirist, properly so called, according to some, is Guyot. It seems to me absurd to take a man who can only represent a *genre* of literature at a certain stage of development, and call him the first. No writer invents. Satire began when man began to be oppressed; it was worth listening to in France as soon as men learned to put together their own language in a poetic form; from that date it has gone on following the laws which regulate all literary development, and obedient to the circumstances which surrounded it. The great grumbler Guyot, undoubtedly a satirist, lives in an age which he calls "horrible and stinking." He finds himself constrained to write a "Bible" (book). He has been in Germany, all over France, in Palestine; he knows all the great lords of the time; he has been a monk, and knows all the monasteries:—those where the monks wash and oil their heads at night to make them soft and glittering in the morning; those where the abbot and cellarers drink up all the clear wine and send to the refectory only the thick: those, like Cluny, where

you have to fast when you are hungry, to keep awake when you are sleepy, and roar all night long in the church, and where you get nothing to eat but rotten eggs and beans. As for the vices of the age, Guyot can only find one—that of avarice—for serious indignation. He attacks women, it is true, for their lightness and dissimulation; nuns for the unclean state of their houses; lawyers for their chicanery; physicians for their ignorance. No real indignation about this man; only the ill-natured venting of disappointment. He has been a monk and does not like the restraints of the cloister; he has been a hanger-on at courts, and has got no reward. He is getting old, in short, and must go back to that eternal "bawling in church" which is his special vexation.

Another and a very different "Bible" is that of Hugues de Bréze. He is no disappointed musician-monk. He is an elderly, respectable knight, who, having taken his share in the fighting, now goes home and amuses his old age in writing a grave and solemn satire on the evils of the time; not because he is in a rage with everybody, nor because he likes to talk about vice, but because he is saddened by its spectacle, and hopes to do something to stop its progress. "Some of us," he says, "are usurers; some of us are robbers; some murderers; some are full of luxury, and others are full of license." And then he preaches on the folly of loving, while inevitable death stares us in the face.

Another outlet for the satirical spirit were the parodies of the *chansons de geste*. From the chronicles of valorous deeds the transition was easy to the ridicule of the defeats and mockery of the enemy. One of these parodies, for instance, represents our Henry III. surrounded by his barons, swearing to exterminate the

French, to carry Paris by assault, to set the Seine on fire, to burn all the mills, and to carry the Sainte-Chapelle to London. Simon de Montfort interrupts his boasting by reminding him that the French, who are not by any means lambs, will probably have something to say for themselves.

In another a knight is drawn—

> As great a coward, this story tells,
> As ever hid in convent cells.

The tale is modelled exactly on the *chansons de geste.* It begins by giving us the history of the hero's family. His father, Count Turgibus, pale and yellow, with a neck like an ostrich, is a great man of war, who pierces the wings of butterflies with his lance; his mother, the one-eyed Rainberge. The usual presages of future greatness surround the heir at his birth. There are no nightingales, it is true, struck mute at the advent of so great a man; the stars do not pale; but the ass, the dog, and the cat of the castle shriek all night, and so proclaim their sense of what has come into the world. Audigier, the hero, grows up the type of awkwardness, clumsiness, and ugliness. The tale goes on to show how he set out on his travels in search of adventure, and what befell him, finishing with his marriage to the frightful Tronce Crevace.

There were, lastly, the Wonderful Adventures of travellers, a favourite theme from the time of Lucian, who doubtless borrowed from some one else. The *dit d'aventures* relates how a traveller, losing his way in an enchanted forest, is attacked by brigands; how he is saved from their daggers by a she-wolf and her brood of twelve young wolves; how he falls into the river, and is rescued by taking the bait of a fisherman, who drags

him to the surface; and how he is swallowed by an enormous monster, from whom he is rescued by a friendly bull, who gores the monster in the flanks, and so opens a way for escape.

Chapter II.

RUTEBEUF THE TROUVÈRE.

Jog on, jog on, the footpath way,
And merrily hent the stile-a;
A merry heart goes all the way,
Your sad tires in a mile-a.—*Winter's Tale.*

IF such were the songs, what were the singers? The only answer is to present one, a professional *trouvère* of the thirteenth century, a member of that fraternity which went up and down the country, travelling from castle to castle, from town to town. No kind of life more tempting to one who was not content to sit at home and see nothing, than the life of a *trouvère*. The Crusades had spoiled the grand pilgrimage, which before had been the excitement of a lifetime. When Jerusalem fell into the hands of the Saracens, the one supreme pleasure of life was lost with it, namely, to leave every thing, care, trouble, debts, wife, and children—to go away, staff in hand, license in pocket, and trudge through Europe and across Asia Minor to the Holy Land. And now only the local saints, a feeble folk, were left. At home, the rules were strict about keeping

to your own work, your own dress, your own town, even your own food, so that life was doleful in its monotony, and we are not surprised when we hear how the minstrels so crowded every road that King Philip Augustus restricted their numbers by law, and sent all the rest out of the country. Some went to Italy, and some went to England. At Bologna there were so many French minstrels that they made a law to prohibit their singing in the streets.

A pleasant life, if only the competition was not too keen, to take the road when the winter was fairly gone and the spring set in; to visit, one after the other, the places where the singer was always welcome—to sing the old song outside, sure of a joyous reception within.

Watch of the tower,
Guard for your hour
The walls of the castle secure from the foe.
While on my lute I play
Love song and roundelay,
Ere, once again, on my journey I go.

If the minstrel were lucky, he might get taken into some great noble's castle, haply even into the palace of the king. Philip Augustus, for instance, had Dans Helynand always with him to refresh his soul, as Saul had David. Judging from the only poem of Helynand's that I have seen, Philip's enviable soul was easily refreshed.

Below the rank of *trouvère* was the *jongleur*. He it was who could play any sort of instrument, sing any kind of song, cure every disease, tell stories, throw in satirical bits at monks and their wicked ways. He was not too proud to turn somersaults; he knew all the folk-lore and the proverbs; he had been everywhere; could recite adventures by sea and land; tell of hours of peril

with the infidel, fights with strange sea-monsters. He had seen the court of the great Khalif of Cairo; he knew the city of Prester John; and if no suspicious eye was watching, he would tell fortunes, cast horoscopes, give children to the childless, and prolong the life of the dying. Above all, he it was who relieved the monotony of existence in the country town. He it was who kept up by his unflagging spirits, his jokes, and his songs, the popular illusion of the jovial wandering life. What school-boy has not mourned over the cruel fate that forbids him to be a gipsy, a cheap Jack, a clown? Sings the *jongleur*—

I lead a good life semper quam possum;
The host brings his bill, and I say, "Ecce assum."
At spending my money semper paratus sum;
When I think in my heart, et meditatus sum,
Ergo dives habet nummos sed non habet ipsum.

Love, singing, and drinking libenter colo
To play after dinner cum deciis volo:
Though I know that the dice non sunt sine dolo.
Unâ vice I praise myself, then I repent,
Omnia sunt hominum tenui pendentia filo.

To drink the good wine fui generatus,
To hoard up my treasure non exstiti natus,
Certain it is I am not locupletatus,
For the miser was never to Heaven exaltatus;
Despice divitias si vis animo esse beatus.

As yet, remark, there is no censorship of literature. The poet is free; to be sure, if he allows himself undue license, there are irregular penalties not laid down by law. His tongue may be pierced, or his eyes put out, or his ears sliced. These are little dangers in the way, but they are rarely met with. Most *trouvères* and *jongleurs* say just what they please, as privileged as the King's fool. Literature is free, and for a good three hundred years, every one, saving the respect due to the

church, may sing, recite, or narrate any thing he likes; which is, above all, the most important point to remember about that mediæval life in which the songs of the minstrel played so great a part.

All this brings us to Rutebeuf, who occupies a middle position between the *jongleur* and *trouvère*. When he is out of luck he is the people's poet; when things go well with him, he frequents great halls, and sings for lords and ladies. We know nothing of his life, except what we can construct from his poems. His contemporaries never mention him. And yet of all the *trouvères* he is the most original, the most real, and therefore the most attractive. The short biography which follows I tender with great deference to that historical spirit which requires proof. For of proof there is little. It is evolved from the careful reading of his poems and attention to the circumstances of the time. Some of the details may be wrong; the broad facts I am sure are true.

He was born early in the thirteenth century, of humble parentage, as his name denotes. He was a quick, sharp lad, and being endowed with a marvellously sweet voice, was taken into the service of the church in some Champagne town. Here he received from the monks the rudiments of learning, and was taught to sing and play.

Some benefactor—perhaps the abbot, perhaps the seigneur—assisted him to go to the University of Paris, where he fought, gambled, sung, danced, and comported himself like young Frollo till the time came when the stream of bounty ceased, and the grim necessity of labour stared him in the face. No thesis had been held, no degree had been conferred; no learning had been acquired. But the sweet boyish soprano was now a fine,

vigorous tenor; his knowledge of musical instruments had extended till there was nothing he could not play, from the lute to the bagpipes; and he could sing and recite countless songs and fabliaux.

Great Gaster, first Master of Arts, according to Rabelais, decreed that he should be a minstrel. So he copied out his own verses fair, made up the budget which was to form his "entertainment," tied up his personal belongings, which would make but a small parcel, and, with his lute in his hand, started on the tramp. Going on the tramp in his century was more picturesque than at present, undoubtedly; and could the minstrel have foreseen the advent of a day when all the splendour of costume was to vanish, with the glittering of armour, and the glory of banners, he would certainly have enjoyed his march more. On the other hand, there were robbers—not so many as were to come a hundred years later, which might also have consoled a prophet—but still enough to convey a lasting and ever-present sense of danger. You might at any time be caught and plundered of everything. If you were suspected of having portable property concealed, there were a thousand ingenious and persuasive arts by which you would be induced to tell what and where it was. Few natures can resist the pleading of a brigand, accompanied by the prod of his knife—though this was elementary. There were twistings by the thumbs and by the wrist, parboilings, partial roastings, with other rough and handy measures of persuasion. Above all, since dead men alone tell no tales, there was always the nearest tree to be dreaded. Therefore, when men journeyed in a small company, so far from the minstrel being encouraged to beguile the way by song, he would be more often warned not to

bring the enemy upon them by his unseasonable noise. And in winter time there were wolves—troops and swarms of wolves.

In the great towns there were always inns where money was to be made, and public places where a platform could be erected; between the towns lay the castles, and it was too often the minstrel's unhappy lot to find in the seigneur a man with no more taste for music than a Babbage, or already cleaned out by previous visitors.

It was not for a poor minstrel like Rutebeuf to despise the village *place* and the stage of the *jongleur*. Dressed in the conventional robe which proclaimed his calling in the triple capacity of singer, quack, and traveller, he posed upon the boards and sang his song before he sold his drugs. Who has toothache? Who has rheumatism? Who wants to be young again? Behold the elixir of life; behold the herb gathered at peril of life and limb from under the very nose of the Paynim. The price is nominal, for the vendor has no other motive in selling it than the good of his kind. And as to the qualifications of the wandering philanthropist—but listen to the song of Autolycus:—

Holà! lords and ladies all,
Gentles great and villains small,
Hear what luck doth you befall
On this day.
There is no deceit or guile.
You will own it, if a while
You will stay.

Sit down all, 'twill please you well;
While my tale I sing and tell,
Strange and rare.
Sirs, I am a doctor wise,
Many lands have seen these eyes,
Here and there.

Cairo's city knows my face;
There I treated for a space
Man and maid.
Then I cross'd me o'er the seas,
'Till my ship brought me to Greece,
Where I stay'd.

Next to Italy I came,
Laden with my gold and fame,
Curing all.
There I found herbs strange to see,
Fit to heal all ills that be,
Great and small.

Thence I journeyed to the stream
Where the precious jewels gleam,
Day and night.
But, alas! I could not land,
Prester John was close at hand
With his might.

Yet they brought me from the port
Stones and gems of such a sort,
(Magic art,)
That at merest touch the dead
Come to life and lift their head,
Light of heart.

Leaving the road, Rutebeuf settled down in Paris, where it is sad to relate that he took to the line on which satirists, the most independent, as they are also the most virtuous, of men, are especially severe—he began to court the great. He depended entirely on patronage, wrote songs to order, preached up the Crusades, though his heart must have felt ready to burst as each successful song armed another of the knights his patrons, and sent him far from his reach to die on the sands of Africa; wept floods of tears, to please the saintly king, over captive Jerusalem; and only occasionally allowed himself the luxury of writing to please himself.

He was always horribly poor, mainly because he was "sair hadden doon" by the vice of gambling:—

I gape with hunger, I cough with cold,
My bed is of thorns, and my clothes are old;
I sit forlorn, with my pockets bare,
In Paris, the city of all good fare;
And I lie all day on my pallet bed,
Because I've no money to buy me bread.

In the midst of his poverty, and with the absence of prudence which distinguishes alike the poet and the parson—their only point of resemblance—he married, and had a large family. What became of the young Rutebeufs I do not know, but we may fear the worst, from the example set them by their thriftless father. In one of those heavy moods which fall sometimes upon all bards, he had the bad taste to write about his own wife, even to complain of her age and ugliness. No doubt the poor woman, who certainly could not read, never saw her husband's verses:—

Home and money I had none:
Yet I married. Was it done
Out of pure goodwill—
All to cheer and comfort those
Who hate my luck and love my woes,
And would wish me ill?

Such a wife, too, I must choose:
Poor and ragged as her spouse:
Pale and thin of face.
Neither fair nor young was she,
Fifty years her age might be,
Tall, and scant of grace.

However, having married, he must work harder. Day after day he has to go out, carrying his bag as well as his lute—for he receives payment in kind for his songs:—

When home I go with a swollen pack
Swinging heavily at my back,
My wife jumps up with a joyful cry,
And throws her spindle and spinning by.

nd then there is roasting of chickens, buying of new read, and rejoicing of the children.

But there are too many children. While his wife is nfined with another baby, the nurse brings back the , for which she has not been paid, and threatens to ave it at the house unless the poor distracted *trouvère* ll pay her bill. "Leave it here?" he cries in exas- ration, "to bellow all about the house?" He will do hing for the child. He loses his temper, and cries impatiently:—

Cil dame Diex qui le fist nestre
Li doinst chevance.

ch, gentle reader, you may translate for yourself. esently more misfortunes fall upon him, and he ares himself to Job: he loses the sight of one eye, ne which sees best; he gets poorer instead of richer, worse than all, he gets old.

Alas! the years of youth are o'er,
Its many sports are spent;
Age is come, I sing no more,
'Tis time that I repent.

, too, La Fontaine laments his sins when he is too o sin any more:—

Mille autres passions, des sages condamnées,
Ont pris comme à l'envi la fleur de mes années.

, too, Henry Murger, Marot, Villon. They are like. When the last hour comes they send for the st, and patch up a hasty peace with the church. d, easy-going French church! She receives all se sinners on the easiest terms, gives them the kiss a mother who only laughs at the follies of her dren, and promises them, before they go to bed, giveness and a whole holiday for the morrow.

o the *trouvère* puts down his lute, heaves a sigh,

and dies. Songs, ballads, exhortations to the Crusad *fabliaux*, mysteries and miracles, and poems agai the monks—these are the literary baggage of Ru beuf.

As regards the last, he is the boldest assailan the church; not for her doctrines, understand, but the evil lives of her servants:—

> Her sons are sleeping, watch and ward are left
> In peril great—of all but God bereft.

He is beside himself when he attacks the hypocr he would like to hang them all:—

> Faus papelárs, faus hypocrites,
> Fausse vie menez et orde;
> Qui vous pendroit à vostre corde
> Il auroit faict bonne journée.

He was not, however, the first who assailed crisy. We find the hypocrite in the "Castoiement père à un fils" (translated from the "Disciplina calis"):—

> Fair without and clean I am,
> Clothed in the skin of a stolen lamb.

We shall meet him afterwards perpetually, till h minates in Tartuffe. Hear what Rutebeuf says monks:—

> By many a shift and many a part
> Live they who know no trade or art
> To gain their life in honest way.
> Some clothe themselves in sackcloth grey,
> And some, to show the good they do,
> Go without shirts the whole year through.
>
> The Jacobins, so rich at home,
> Rule Paris here, and there rule Rome;
> Kings and Apostles both are they,
> And year by year still grows their sway.
>
> For when one dies, if in his will
> The Order be not mention'd, still
> His soul may wait without, that so
> The Order thus may greater grow.

In the "Chanson des Ordres" Rutebeuf parades the
ole crew of monks, bestowing an impartial flagella-
n on each in turn. There is the Jacobin, the Corde-
, the Carmelite, the Trappist.
hen there is, all by himself in a separate "diz," the
risee, clad in a simple robe, pale and dried of face,
austere air, cruel and malicious more than lion,
rd, or scorpion. And lastly, there is the béguine,
(whatever she does, whether she weeps or laughs,
s or dreams) is always a saint:

Sa parole est prophétie,
S'ell rit, c'est compaignie;
S'ell pleure, c'est dévocion;
S'ell dort, ell est ravie;
S'ell songe, c'est vision;
S'ell ment, n'en créez mie.

utebeuf is also the author of the very best of the
niracle plays. Short as it is, it is written with a
hand. The situations are effective, simple, and
ing.
his is hardly the place for a notice of his "Theo-
s," the study of which belongs to the history of
les and mysteries. Like his *fabliaux*, it is re-
able for the great clearness of treatment.
t the principal function of the minstrel was to put
a poetical form all the stories which he could
ct together, and to tell over again those which
rs had collected. The *fabliau* is, above all, the
place to look for mediæval fun, satire, or humour,
well as for mediæval manners and customs. The
iau was essentially the amusement of the winter
nings; happy he who could write a new one or
ish up an old one.
lere the curé and the friar come to well-merited
f; here the jealous husband is outwitted; here *la*

femme—the life and soul of the stories—is alterna glorified and disgraced—ofttimes the latter:—

Feme est de trop foible nature,
De noient rit, de noient pleure,
Feme aime et het en trop poi d'eure.

Here is the story of the "Médecin malgré lui;" that of Griselda—"Griselidis"—the type of pa conjugal virtue; and here the real popular belief a religion. An example of the last is the *fabliau* o "Villain who gained Paradise by pleading."

The poor rustic dies; he is so humble that no neither angel nor devil, cares to have anything with his soul. He wanders alone and unmolested he finds himself at the gates of Heaven.

I tell a tale that once I read:
'Tis of a villain, long since dead,
And of his soul. He passed away
One Friday at the close of day.
When it behoved the man to die,
Angel or devil, none was by;
And so the soul, from body reft,
Stood waiting there, unheeded left.
None came to claim it; all in awe,
Yet half-rejoiced, the poor soul saw
No devil instant flames command,
No angel's smiling face at hand.
Then looking curious here and there,
Perceived a distant portal, where
Saint Michael's self was leading straight
A happy soul through Heaven's gate.
The villain followed, till at last
To Paradise itself he passed.
Saint Peter, Heaven's porter, who
Had opened gates to let them through,
The soul received by Michael brought,
And then his eyes the villain caught.
"Who art thou?" asked he, when he saw
The soul come in against the law.
"Here is there entrance none, except
For those by judgment strict elect.
Besides, in truth, by Saint Gillain,

We want not here base-born villain."
To whom the villain made reply,
"No worse than you, fair saint, am I;
Harder are you than any stone;
Small honour have the churches won
From your apostleship. 'Twas you
Who did deny your Saviour true."
Ashamed and angry, Peter stayed,
And called Saint Thomas to his aid.
Said Thomas, "Leave the case to me,
Not long in Heaven his soul shall be."
Then to the villain goes, and, "Say
By what authority you stay,
False villain, where no soul may come
Without escort? This is no home
For such as you. From Paradise
Begone at once."

The villain cries,
"Ah! Thomas, Thomas, is it well
For thee such measure rude to tell?
Art thou not he who, doubting still,
Wouldst not confess thy Lord until,
False and of little faith, I ween,
His very wounds thine eyes had seen?"
Saint Thomas, grieved, with answer none,
Bent low his head, and next is gone
Straight to Saint Paul. "Now, by my head,"
Cried Paul, "this villain shall be sped.—
Villain," said he, "you enter here,
Regardless of all right, all fear;
Know, villain base, of low degree,
That Paradise is not for thee:
Therefore begone."

"What!" cried the soul,
"Do I behold the Apostle Paul?
Paul, he who, cruel beyond compare,
Stoned Stephen, first of martyrs fair?
Full well I know thy life of old,
How many a man, betray'd and sold,
Was put to death by thee and thine,
Apostle fair, and saint divine.
Ha! have I not thy exploits heard?"
Saint Paul, abashed, with never a word
In answer, with confusion burned,
And to the other two returned.

It will easily be guessed that it is well not to tra
late any further. The villain is allowed to remain
Heaven.

This boldness in dealing with subjects of the dee
reverence is entirely characteristic of the *fabliau.*
is due partly to their mock religious ceremonies,
partly to the intense hatred of the monks which
ran all France in the three centuries immediately
ceding the Reformation. Thus, we have the l
Paternoster, where every clause is a peg for a
sentiments; the *Credo* of the Ribaut:—

> *Credo*—I believe in dice;
> Without a penny for the price
> Full often have they got me meat,
> Good wine to drink, and friends to treat;
> And sometimes, too, when luck went worse,
> They've stripped me clean of robe and purse.

And so on. There is the *Credo* of the usurer dying, and makes his last confession:—

> *Credo*—this my faith receive:
> In my coffers I believe.
> *In Deum*—what shall I do?
> My wife is such a thriftless shrew.
> *Patrem*—if I leave her these,
> And get well of my disease,
> Half at least she'd waste and spend.
> *Omnipotentem*—ah! my friend,
> I remember how, one day,
> Five whole livres she threw away;
> And a hundred sous and more—
> *Creatorem*—gone before.

There are knightly stories, and tricks of vil
There is the story of Narcissus, of Graelent, of Au
and Nicolette, the prettiest of pretty stories; th
of Aristotle, and a thousand tales which may be
still with pleasure. Grave faults there are, of co
and a selection must be made.

The *fabliau*, everything by turns, was thus the real instructor of the people, who could read nothing, were taught nothing, knew nothing. It was for this reason that the church, taking alarm at the great influence which the satirical *fabliaux* had obtained, devised the plan of teaching sound doctrines by the same means. In these was inculcated the worship of the Virgin, of different saints, the duty and rewards of keeping up the [illegible]rch, of paying dues, attending services, and the like. [illegible] then people began to yawn, and so the *fabliau* [illegible]into disrepute. But that was long after Rutebeuf [illegible] the following, which is the story of the "Ass's [illegible]ill and Testament," with which we will finish this

A priest there was in times of old,
Fond of his church, but fonder of gold,
Who spent his days and all his thought
In getting what he preached was nought.
His chests were full of robes and stuff,
Corn filled his garners to the roof,
Stored up against the fair-times gay,
From Saint Rémy to Easter Day.
An ass he had within his stable,
A beast most sound and valuable.
For twenty years he lent his strength
For the priest his master, till at length,
Worn out with work and age, he died.
The priest, who loved him, wept and cried;
And, for his service long and hard,
Buried him in his own churchyard.

Now turn we to another thing:
'Tis of a bishop that I sing.
No greedy miser he, I ween;
Prelate so generous ne'er was seen.
Full well he loved in company
Of all good Christians still to be;
When he was well, his pleasure still,
His medicine best when he was ill.

Always his hall was full, and there
His guests had ever best of fare.

Whate'er the bishop lack'd or lost
Was bought at once despite the cost;
And so, in spite of rent and score,
The bishop's debts grew more and more.
For true it is—this ne'er forget—
Who spends too much gets into debt.
One day his friends all with him sat,
The bishop talking this and that,
Till the discourse on rich clerks ran,
Of greedy priests, and how their plan
Was all good bishops still to grieve,
And of their dues their lords deceive.
And then the priest of whom I've told
Was mention'd; how he loved his gold.
And because men do often use
More freedom than the truth would choose,
They gave him wealth, and wealth so much,
As those like him could scarcely touch.
"And then beside, a thing he 's done,
By which great profit might be won,
Could it be only spoken here."
Quoth the bishop, "Tell it without fear."
"He 's worse, my lord, than Bedouin,
Because his own dead ass, Baldwin,
He buried in the sacred ground."
"If this is truth, as shall be found,"
The bishop cried, "a forfeit high
Will on his worldly riches lie.
Summon this wicked priest to me;
I will myself in this case be
The judge. If Robert's word be true,
Mine are the fine and forfeit too."

The priest comes when summoned.

"Disloyal! God's enemy and mine,
Prepare to pay a heavy fine.
Thy ass thou buriest in the place
Sacred by church. Now, by God's grace,
I never heard of crime more great.
What! Christian men with asses wait?
Now, if this thing be proven, know
Surely to prison thou wilt go."
"Sir," said the priest, "thy patience grant;
A short delay is all I want.

Not that I fear to answer now—
But give me what the laws allow."
And so the bishop leaves the priest,
Who does not feel as if at feast.
But still, because one friend remains,
He trembles not at prison pains.
His purse it is which never fails
For tax or forfeit, fine or vails.

The term arrived, the priest appeared,
And met the bishop, nothing feared;
For 'neath his girdle safe there hung
A leathern purse, well stocked and strung
With twenty pieces fresh and bright,
Good money all, none clipped or light.
"Priest," said the bishop, "if thou have
Answer to give to charge so grave,
'Tis now the time."

"Sir, grant me leave
My answer secretly to give.
Let me confess to you alone,
And, if needs be, my sins atone."
The bishop bent his head to hear,
The priest he whispered in his ear:
"Sir, spare a tedious tale to tell—
My poor ass served me long and well,
For twenty years my faithful slave,
Each year his work a saving gave
Of twenty sous—so that in all
To twenty livres the sum will fall.
And, for the safety of his soul,
To you, my lord, he left the whole."
"'Twas rightly done," the bishop said,
And gravely shook his godly head:
"And, that his soul to heaven may go,
My absolution I bestow."

Now have you heard a truthful lay,
How with rich priests the bishops play,
And Rutebeuf the moral draws
That, spite of kings' and bishops' laws,
No evil times hath he to dread
Who still has silver at his need.

Note on Reynard the Fox.

During these centuries there were gradually growing up the various stories which go to make the immense assemblage known as "Reynard the Fox." The Reynard series, which in France numbers some three hundred and twenty thousand lines, began, it is quite uncertain when, but probably in the tenth or eleventh century, with the Latin poem of Reinardus Vulpes. This was written somewhere east of the Rhine, and somewhere north of the Loire. No other limits can be assigned, no other date can be given. It is absurd for the Germans to claim the work, as they have done, and almost as absurd for the French. Let us give the original Reynard to Belgium.

This enormous work, wherein the whole of the mediæval life is represented, its satire, its ambitions, its desires, its follies, may be compared to a great cathedral, round which are grouped the smaller chapels, each the idea of a different architect, while in the building itself every artist has been free to carve what he pleased, and every workman seems to have left his individual mark. The names of the poets have perished. Here and there one tells us something about himself. "I am a priest of La Croix en Brie," says one. "I am a merchant and a grocer," says another. And thus each adds his quota to the stupendous whole and goes away.

I can only here briefly indicate the main points of the old French *Renart.*

The legend has been divided into three periods perfectly distinct. The first, which contained the Reinardus Vulpes, the French, Flemish, and German Reynard, brings us to the beginning of the thirteenth century.

The second, containing the "Crowning of Reynard," belongs also to the thirteenth century.

The third belongs to a new state of society, in the fifteenth century, and contains *Renart le contrefait.*

The first period is the one best known. It is on this poem that Goethe has made his Reineke Fuchs. Reynard is a proper name, like that of Isengrin for the wolf. The *dramatis personæ*—to give them their French names—Noble the lion, Brun the bear, Firapel the leopard, Brichemer the stag, Tardif the snail, bearer of the royal banner, Bernard the ass and archbishop, Tybert the cat, Belin the ram, Escoffle the kite, Tiercelin the raven—these three last are confessors, Chanticleer the cock, Grimbert the badger, Cointerians the monkey, Rakenau the she-monkey, the last three being near relations of Reynard.

Reynard is not bound by any of the rules of chivalric honour.

He runs away. He hides and waits. He lies, thieves, and practises every sort of dishonourable action. He relies on his cunning more than his strength. He is poor. He lives retired in his castle of Malpertuis with Hermeline his wife, and his three sons Percehaie, Malebranche, and Rovel. Sometimes there is nothing to eat. Then Reynard makes the children an improving speech and goes out to see what he can pick up.

His quarrels and battle with Isengrin are the principal incidents. We need not follow a well-known story. As for the satire, all that the Middle Ages venerated, all that they practised with faith and with love—pilgrimages, crusades, miracles, pious legends, judicial duels, confession, chivalry, all are parodied here without indignation, without violence, with a gentle irony which is none the less profound for its lightness. The hen, murdered by Reynard, is canonised—miracles are wrought upon her tomb. These must be true, *because they are attested by the dog.* Reynard then asks the king's permission to expiate his faults, is told that he may go, though the king does not approve of pilgrimages and pilgrims—

> For all observe this custom sad,
> They set out good and come back bad.

The popularity of these poems is significant of a great deal. We see in them the feeling that there is something besides brute force; that cunning and craft may prevail against the stately strength of the knight in chain armour.

> "Miex valt engien que ne fet force."

A new ruler is to be born, a new career open to those who are able to seize upon it; it is the rule of those who have brains over those who have none. And as for the church, this "Roman de Renart" affords another proof of the great fact that never once has the mind of man acquiesced in the rule of priests. Kings have imposed it for the sake of order; scholars have been silent for the sake of order; good priests themselves have accepted it for the sake of order. The honest sense of the people, terrified at times by superstitious terrors, has all along known that it was a false and a cruel thing, hateful to God and harmful to man.

Chapter III.

THE ROMANCE OF THE ROSE.

Be it right or wrong, these men among
On women do complain;
Affirming this, how that it is
A labour spent in vain
To love them well; for never a dele
They love a man again.

The Nut-Brown Maid.

WE have to treat of a book which for two hundred and fifty years continued to live as a sort of Bible in France; the source whence its readers drew their maxims of morality, their philosophy, their science, their history, and even their religion; and which, after having retained its popularity for a length of time almost unparalleled in the history of literature, was revived with success after the Renaissance, the only mediæval book which for a long space of years enjoyed this distinction in France.

I shall endeavour to show some of the reasons of this long-continued success, and to prove that the book, once the companion of knights and dames, of *damoiseaux*

and *damoiselles*, has the strongest claims on the student of the Middle Ages; that it is not a congeries of dry and dead bones of antiquity, not a mass of mediæval fables, but a book full of ideas, information, and suggestion—a book warm with life.

English readers know the "Romance of the Rose" through the translation which is attributed to Chaucer. Whether it be really his or not is a matter which does not concern us here, and, to save trouble in explanation, I will refer to it as Chaucer's translation. It is unfortunate, in some respects, that it contains only a portion—viz., the first 5,170 lines, and then, with an omission of 5,544 lines, about 1,300 more. It gives entire the portion contributed by Guillaume de Lorris, and as much of the remainder as fell in most readily with the humour of the translator, the attack on the hypocrisy of monks and friars. But by omitting all the rest, amounting to about two-thirds of the whole, he has failed altogether in giving the spirit of the work; and those who read only Chaucer's version would certainly be at a loss to explain the rapid, extraordinary, and lasting popularity which the book achieved.

The reasons of this popularity have, indeed, been the subject of considerable discussion among French critics. Pasquier speaks of its "noble sentiments," and considers that its object was moral—viz., to show that love is but a dream. Roquefort can see in it only a long and rather stupid allegory, enlivened by occasional gleams of poetry; Villemain considers it a mere gloze on Ovid's "Art of Love," with a *mélange* of abstractions, allegories, and scholastic subtleties. Nisard deduces from its popularity a proof of its entire conformity with the spirit of the age—an almost obvious conclu-

sion. Other writers, Goujet among the number, try to account for its success by the reputation which Jean de Meung enjoyed as an alchemist, and the belief that the great secrets of the science were to be found in the poem: a manifestly inadequate reason, because the proportion of alchemists to the rest of his readers must have been small indeed. Others, among whom were Molinet and Marot—of whom more presently—thought its success was due to a double allegory which they found in it; while Professor Morley and Mr. Thomas Wright, the latest writers who have given any account of the book—both of them meagre, dry, and uninteresting—do not attempt to explain its popularity at all. There are sufficient reasons why the book sprang at once into favour, which I hope presently to explain. The great success which it attained is illustrated by the number and weight of its assailants. Foremost among these was Gerson, the "most Christian Doctor." He calls it a book written for the basest purposes; he says that if there were only one copy of it in the world, and if he were offered fifty pounds in gold for it, he would rather burn it: that those who have it ought to give it up to their father confessors to be destroyed: and that even if it were certain—which was unfortunately far from being the case, the contrary being presumable—that Jean de Meung had repented his sins in sackcloth and ashes, it would be no more use praying for him than for Judas Iscariot himself. Cursing so ecclesiastical, invective so angry, stimulated public curiosity more and more, and instead of copies being given to confessors to be burned, copies were given to scribes to be multiplied. Assailants came every day unto the field. Christine de Pisan, later on, took up the cause of her sex, and vindicated womankind from the sweeping charges made

against them by the poet; while Martin Franc, who styled himself "Le Champion des Dames," wrote an elaborate apology for his clients, which has all the dreariness of the "Romance of the Rose," and none of its brightness. The one is a desert indeed; the other is a desert with oases.

The book is the work of two writers, Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung. The earlier of these seems to have died about the time that his successor was born. Of his life we know absolutely nothing. He came from the little town of Lorris, where, it is said, the house in which he was born is still shown. Two or three lines in the poem are cited to prove the date of his birth and death, and at the close of his part we get the following note by a scholiast:—

> Here William died; his song was done.
> When forty years had passed away,
> Sir John the romance carried on,
> And here commencing, told the lay.

While Jean de Meung himself says, safely prophesying about himself:—

> Car quant Guillaume cessera
> Jehan le continuera
> Après sa mort, que je ne mente,
> Anns trespassés plus de quarente.

So that if we fix the date of Jean de Meung, we have that of Guillaume de Lorris. Now, there is nothing to help us except a tradition that Guillaume died in the middle of the thirteenth century, and whatever internal evidence the book itself affords. Most writers, because the order of Knights Templars is mentioned as still existing, have been content to date the book at about 1306, the year before the destruction of the fraternity; but the poet mentions Charles of

Anjou as King of Sicily. We have, therefore, a much narrower limit, viz., the year 1282. It is sufficient for our purpose to date Jean de Meung's authorship at about 1280, and that of Guillaume de Lorris at 1240.

It is not at all certain that Guillaume de Lorris was very young when he feigned his dream. The hero of the poem is necessarily a young man, because early manhood is the period of vehement desire and passion. Twenty is the typical age of early manhood; that age may have very well been selected as the one best fitted for dreams of love and the adventures of a lover. I am, however, inclined to believe, on the whole, that the poem was written when he was still quite young. A tradition which only recalls one fact is generally true, and the one fact recorded of the poet is that he died quite young. Internal evidence, too, appears to support this view. His style bears marks which seem, though one may here be very easily mistaken, those of inexperience. Thus, the imaginative faculty is abundant, and even luxuriant; the descriptive power, fully employed in his portraits of abstract personifications, is very much above the average; he revels in picturesque accessories and details which his copious fancy has conjured up; and his pictures, if they have not always the *tone*, have all the vividness, with the prodigality of work, which belongs to a young poet's early style. The versification, moreover, is cold, regular, and monotonous; there is nothing to indicate the possession of experience or the presence of passion. He has read Ovid, and used him freely to suit his own purposes; but he wants Ovid's sympathetic power, and tries to supply its place by a certain cold and mannered grace; his faults being attributable, on the assumption of his early death, more to inexperience

and youth, than to any defects which years would not have removed. Considered in this light, his work remains an unfinished monument of early genius, a work which would never have been rescued from oblivion, but for the splendour of light thrown on it by Jean de Meung.

Chaucer's translation is exceedingly accurate, giving line for line, and almost word for word, save when he sometimes adds a line to enforce its meaning, or to make it clear. Thus, when translating the famous

> Li robe ne faict pas le moyne,

he says—

> Habite ne makyth monk ne frere;
> But clene life and devocioun
> Makyth gode men of religioun;

and Rutebeuf says—

> Li abis ne fet pas l'ermite.

The saying itself (for nothing in the "Romance of the Rose" appears to be original) may perhaps be traced to Neckham, who died at Cirencester in 1217:—

> Non tonsura facit monachum, non horrida vestis,
> Sed virtus animi, perpetuusque vigor.

The great ease of the translation makes it read almost like an original work, though I cannot agree with those who think that the translator has improved on his model. No literal translation, not even the very best, can be free from some stiffness and constraint. At the same time, the felicity with which difficult passages are occasionally rendered may be judged by the following lines, which contain a touch almost worthy of Shirley. Here it is, original and translation, side by side:—

Les yeux gros et si envoisiés,	Hir eyen greye and glad also,
Qu'il rioient tousjors avant	That laugheden ay in hir semblaunt,
Que la bouchette par couvant.	First or the mouth by couvenant.

That is, her eyes began to laugh before her lips.

Let us, as briefly as possible, set forth the action of the poem. It begins, like De Guilleville's "Pilgrimage of Grace," Chaucer's "Court of Love" (borrowed, of course, from this), Alain de l'Isle's "Complaint of Nature," and a thousand other mediæval works, with a dream. In the month of May,—that season when the earth forgets the poverty of winter, and grows proud of her renewed beauty, clothing herself in a robe of flowers of a hundred colours; when the birds, silent during the long cold months, awake again, and are so joyous that they are fain, *per force*, to sing, the youth of twenty summers wanders forth and comes upon the Garden of Delight (*Déduit*). We may remark how the walled garden, secured from the outer world, is the mediæval writer's only idea of scenery. Perhaps our modern craving for the picturesque would be greatly modified if we too were uncertain, like our ancestors, about those wolves, bears, and brigands, whose admiration for wild scenes induces them to inhabit them.

The wall of the garden is painted with figures of all evil passions, such as Envy, Hatred, Avarice, and Hypocrisy (*Papelardie*), with those of Sorrow, Age, and Poverty. The youth is admitted at a wicket by the Lady Oyseuse (*Idlesse*), and wanders about, admiring the rows of strange trees, the birds and flowers, the peace and safety of the place. Presently he comes upon *Déduit* himself, whom Chaucer calls Myrthe:—

> Ful fayre was Myrthe, ful long and high:
> A fayrer man I never sigh.

With him are all his courtiers, including *Léesce* (Joy):—

> And wot ye who came with them there?
> The Lady Gladness, bright and fair.

With the company was the God of Love, accompanied by *Doux Regard*, bearing two bows: one of them was crooked and misshapen, the other straight, and beautifully wrought. This shows the different impressions of love, or its opposite, produced by the eyes. He had, too, ten arrows (the idea is borrowed from Ovid), five belonging to Love, viz., Beauty, Simplicity, Frankness, Company, and Fair Semblance; and five to Dislike, viz., Pride, Villany, Shame, Despair, and New Thought. Love was followed as well by Beauty, whose attendants were Riches, Largesse, Franchise, and Courtesy, as *Dames d'honneur*, each of whom had with her a lover, that of Largesse being "sib to Arthur, Duke of Bretaigne." This is intended to illustrate how different qualities attract love.

The garden is square; it contains all sorts of fruit trees, "brought from the country of the Saracens;" these are set five or six fathoms apart; wells, fountains, and streams, soft grass and turf, and flowers of every kind. Round the stone-work of one fountain he finds written, "Here died the fair Narcissus"—an accident which enables the poet to narrate at length the full history of that unfortunate swain. Getting over his digression, the youth discovers a rose-bush laden with roses and rosebuds, one of which he desires incontinently to pluck. Here his troubles begin. Love shoots at him with five arrows, and when he is sick and faint with wounds, calls upon him to surrender, and become his vassal. This he does, giving Love as a gage of fealty his heart, and receiving in return a code of rules which have been imitated by many subsequent poets, notably by Chaucer, in the "Court of Love," and by Charles of Orleans. He also receives as a mark of especial favour, Hope, Doux Penser, Doux Parler, and

Doux Regard—Sweet-Thought, Sweet-Speech, and Sweet-Looks, as companions. He makes a rash and ill-considered attempt upon his Rosebud. But Danger is there with Malebouche, Shame (child of Trespass and Reason), and Chastity, the daughter of Shame. He is driven away, loaded with reproaches. His companions leave him, and while he is sitting dejected and despairing Reason comes to him and argues on the folly of love:—

> Love is but madness! I tell you true;
> The man who loves can nothing do:
> He has no profit from the earth:
> If he is clerk, he forgets his learning:
> If anything else, whatever his worth,
> Great is his labour and little his earning.
> Long and unmeasured and deep the pain:
> Short is the joy; the fruition vain.

But the pleading of Reason, as generally happens in such cases, is quite useless. The lover—

> For still within my heart there glows
> The breath divine of that sweet Rose—

goes next to a Friend (Ami), from whom he gets small sympathy, but much practical relief. Acting on his counsel, he begs pardon of Danger, who grants it sulkily. Danger in most mediæval allegories stands for the husband. Getting Bel Accueil to accompany him, he goes once more to see his Rosebud, which he finds greatly improved. Venus obtains for him the privilege of a kiss. Shame, Jealousy, and Malebouche are alarmed, and interfere. Danger turns everybody out. Jealousy builds a high tower, in which Bel Accueil is shut up, a prisoner, with Danger and Malebouche to guard him. Outside the tower sits the disconsolate lover, lamenting his misfortunes, and the

mutability of love's favours, which he compares to those of Fortune, of whom he says:—

> In heart of man
> Malice she plants, and labour, and pain;
> One hour caresses, and smiles, and plays;
> Then as suddenly changes her face:
> Laughs one moment, the next she mourns:
> Round and round her wheel she turns,
> All at her own caprice and will.
> The lowest ascends, and is raised, until
> He who was highest was low on the ground,
> And the wheel of Fortune has quite turned round.

And at this point the poet died—"trespassa Guillaume de Lorris." Had he lived to complete his work we should have had a complete "Ars Amoris," fashioned on the precepts of Ovid, and clothed in an allegory, cold, monotonous, bloodless, though graceful, fanciful, and not devoid of poetic taste.

Perhaps we should have had more than this. In its simple, first meaning, it is not difficult for anyone to make it out. Idleness or Leisure alone makes Pleasure possible; through Idleness we enter into the garden of Delight, where Love wanders. Youth is the season of love, and Spring is an emblem of youth. The escort of Love is the collection of qualities which belong to the time of youth, and make it happy, such as beauty, wealth, and courtesy. What has Reason to do with Love? Who can advise but an experienced friend? The only possession that the vassal can give to Love, the suzerain, is his own heart; the chief aid to success is Bel Accueil—"fair welcome"—while Envy, Shame, (for fear of Malebouche—Calumny), Jealousy, and Chastity protect the maiden.

So far all is clear and easy to be read. Was there not, however, under an interpretation as easy as that of

Bunyan's "Holy War," a second and a deeper meaning? It is a question not easy to answer. Molinet—the dull and laborious Molinet, who published, towards the end of the fifteenth century, an edition of the book in prose—

> Le Roman de la Rose
> Moralisé cler et net,
> Translaté en rime et prose
> Par votre humble Molinet—

pretends not only that there is a hidden meaning, but also to discover what this hidden meaning was. "The young man," he tells us, "who awakens from his dream is the child born to the light: he is born in the month of May, when the birds sing: the *singing of the birds is the preaching of holy doctors* (*!*)." He dresses, in his dreams, to go out. This is the entrance of the child into the world, enveloped in human miseries: the river represents Baptism; the orchard is the Cloister of Religion; outside it, because they cannot enter therein, and have no share or part in Paradise, are the figures of human vices. Déduit is our Lord; Léesce is the Church; Love is the Holy Spirit; the eight doves of Venus's chariot are the eight Beatitudes; and the combat between Love and the guardians of Bel Accueil is the perpetual contest between good and evil. Even the story of Narcissus is not without its meaning; and the pine which shades the fountain is the tree of the Cross, while the fountain itself is the overflowing stream of mercy. Love, again, in the latter part, stands for our Saviour; homage to Him is the profession of faith of a novice; the commandments of Love are the vows of chastity and poverty. And the legend of Virginia is an allegory; the maiden being the soul, and Appius the world. This position he strengthens

by deriving, after the fashion of the philologists of the period, the name of Appius from *a* privative, and *pius*.

Clement Marot, on the other hand, in his edition, where he turned the language into French of his own day, and thereby utterly spoiled it, finds an interpretation of his own, quite as ingenious and quite as improbable as that of Molinet. The Rose is the state of wisdom, "bien et justement conforme à la Rose pour les valeurs, doulours, et odours qui en elle sont: la quelle est à avoir difficile pour les empeschements interposez." It was a Papal Rose, made of gold, and scented with musk and balm; of gold, on account of the honour and reverence due to God; scented with musk to symbolize the duties of fidelity and justice to our neighbours; and with balm because we ought to hold our own souls clear and precious above all worldly things.

Or, the Rose is the state of Grace, difficult for the sinner to arrive at, and fitly symbolized by the flowers which had sufficient virtue to transform Apuleius from an ass back to his human shape.

Or, again, the Rose was the Virgin Mary—the Rose of Jericho, pure and spotless, and not to be touched by human hands.

Fourthly: it was the rose which the Queen of Sheba gave to Solomon, which signified eternal happiness. The interpretations of Molinet and Marot are both manifestly absurd, and represent the pedantic trifling of a time when the taste for double allegories had been carried to a ridiculous extent. And as for Jean de Meung's part, there are plenty of touches in it which show that the writer, though no heretic, had little sympathy with church matters; and would certainly not be disposed to spend his time in laboriously concocting

a riddle of twenty thousand lines, the answer to which was to be found in the Romish creed. And in Guillaume de Lorris himself, it is difficult to find a word for or against the church. He was, no doubt, mindful of the stern lesson read to heretics in the crusade of Provence, fresh in all men's recollection. But he had been nurtured and fed on the poetry of the troubadours; the form of his verse and the turn of his thought were Provençal. Was it likely that so young a writer should escape the spirit of the literature while he studied its form? And since in a time of violent religious excitement, he can find no word of sympathy for a church which persecutes, is it not probable that his sympathies are, if not with the church persecuted, at least with the people?

Whether this was so or not can never now be satisfactorily answered. He left his poem unfinished, hardly, perhaps, begun. Whatever has to be said on the subject of its original plan must be necessarily conjectural. I incline to believe that he did have a religious purpose, which was not understood by Jean de Meung, and that one who bears in mind the religious history of Provence as well as the character of its poetry, may well construct an interpretation of the work of Guillaume de Lorris far more probable and consistent than that of Molinet or of Marot.

Jean de Meung,[1] so called because he was born at the little town of Meung, in the department of Loiret—

De Jean de Meung s'enfle le cours de Loire—

Jean Clopinel, Limping John, because he was lame—

[1] We know next to nothing of his life, but it hardly matters. This is a chapter of "opinions."

finding himself, some forty years later, with his head stuffed full of all the learning of his time, nearly bursting with sentiments, convictions, and opinions on religion, politics, social economy, and science, began, one may suppose, to cast about for some means of getting rid of his burden. Lighting on the unfinished and half-forgotten work of Guillaume de Lorris, he conceived the idea of finishing the allegory, and making it the medium of popularizing his own opinions. He could hardly have hit upon a readier plan. It was not yet a time for popular science; there were no treatises in the vernacular on history, theology, and political economy, and the only way of getting at people was by means of rhyme. But Jean de Meung was no allegorist and no story-teller. He took up the tale, indeed, where his predecessor left it, and carried it on somehow, but in so languid a manner, with so many digressions, turns, and twists, that what little interest was originally in it goes clean out. Nothing can well be more tedious than those brief portions devoted to the conduct of the story. Love calls his barons together, is defeated, sends an embassy to his mother, Venus, who comes to his assistance; the fortress is taken, Bel Accueil is released, and the Rose is plucked. In the course of the poem, Malebouche gets his tongue cut out, Déduit, Doux Regard, Léesce, Doux Penser, and others drop out of the allegory altogether; the Garden is forgotten; all the little careful accessories of Guillaume de Lorris, such as the arrows of Love and his commandments, are contemptuously ignored. Those that remain are changed, the Friend in the second part being very different from the Friend in the first, while Richesse appears with a new function. Every incident is made the peg for a digression, and every digression leads to a dozen others. The

losses of the old characters are made up by the creation of new ones, and, in Faux Semblant, the hypocrite and monk, Jean de Meung anticipates Rabelais and surpasses Erasmus.

Between Guillaume de Lorris and his successor there is a great gulf, hardly represented by the forty years of interval. Men's thoughts had widely changed. The influence of Provençal poetry was finally and completely gone, and its literature utterly fallen, to be revived after many centuries only by the scholar and the antiquarian. More than this, the thoughts and controversies of men, which had turned formerly upon the foundations of the Christian faith, now turned either on special points of doctrine, or on the foundation and principles of society.

No writers, so far as I remember, have noticed the entire separation between the two parts of the romance. They are independent works. Even the allegory changes form, and the idea of the *trouvère* Guillaume was lost and forgotten when his successor professed to carry it on.

In passing from one to the other, the transition is like that from a clear, cold mountain stream to a turbid river, whose waters are stained with factory refuse, and whose banks are lined with busy towns. The mystic element suddenly disappears. Away from the woodland and the mountains, and among the haunts of men, it cannot live. The idea of love becomes gross and vulgar. The fair, clear voice of the poet grows thick and troubled; his gaze drops from the heavens to the earth. It is no longer a *trouvère* bent on developing a hidden meaning, and wrapping mighty secrets of religious truth in a cold and careful allegory; it is a man, unfortunately a Churchman, eager and impetuous, alive

to all the troubles and sorrows of humanity, with a supreme contempt for love, and for woman, the object of love, and a supreme carelessness for the things that occupied the mind of his predecessor. We have said that new characters were introduced. The boundaries of the old allegory were, indeed, too narrow. Jean de Meung had to build, so to speak, the walls of his own museum. It was to be a museum which should contain all the knowledge of the time; to hold miscellaneous collections of facts, opinions, legends, and quotations, than which nothing can be more bewildering, nothing more unmethodical, nothing more *bizarre*.

As a poet he is certainly superior to his predecessor, though Guillaume de Lorris can only be ranked as a second-rate versifier. He is diffuse, apt to repeat himself, generally monotonous, and sometimes obscure. His imagination is less vivid, and his style less clear, than those of Guillaume de Lorris. Occasionally, however, passages of beauty occur. The following, for example, diffuse as it is, appears to me to possess some of the elements of real poetry. The poet is describing a tempest followed by fair weather. Nature weeps at the wrath of the winds:—

> The air itself, in truth, appears
> To weep for this in flooded tears.
> The clouds such tender pity take,
> Their very clothing they forsake:
> And for the sorrow that they bear,
> Put off the ornaments they wear.
>
> * * *
>
> So much they mourn, so much they weep,
> Their grief and sorrow are so deep,
> They make the rivers overflow,
> And war against the meadows low:
> Then is the season's promise crossed;
> The bread made dear, the harvest lost,

And honest poor who live thereby,
Mourn hopes that only rose to die.

* * *

But when the end arrives at last,
And fair times come, and bad are passed;
When from the sky, displeased and pale,
Fair weather robs its rain and hail,
And when the clouds perceive once more
The thunder gone, the tempest o'er—
They then rejoice, too, as they may,
And to be comely, bright, and gay,
Put on their glorious robes anew,
Varied with every pleasant hue;
They hang their fleeces out to dry,
Carding and combing as they fly;
Then take to spinning, and their thread
Abroad through all the heavens spread,
With needles white and long, as though
Their feathery gauntlets they would sew—
Harness their steeds, and mount and fly
O'er valleys deep and mountains high.

It is needless, after what has been said, to pursue any further the story of the romance. There is not much lost by this omission, because the work has really little or nothing to do with the allegory, and might simply be called, "The Opinions of Jean de Meung."

These opinions may be divided into four classes, foremost of which, in his own mind, stands his hatred of monks. In religion he was not an infidel, or even a heretic; he was simply in opposition. He writes, not against sacerdotalism, but against the inversion of recognized order by the vagabond friars. Order, indeed, he would insist upon as strenuously as Hooker himself; but order he would subordinate to what he deems the most essential thing, personal holiness. To decry, deride, and hurl contempt on the monastic orders: to put into the strongest possible

words the inarticulate popular hatred of these was, we believe, his leading thought when he began his book.

His second idea was to make an angry, almost furious protest against the extravagant respect paid to women, and an onslaught on their follies and vices. It is very curious, and shows how little he was trammelled by his allegory, that he fails altogether to see how entirely out of place is such an attack in the "Romance of the Rose."

He had two other principal ideas: one to communicate in the common tongue as much science as the world could boast; and the other, to circulate certain principles of vague and hesitating republicanism which were then beginning to take the place of those religious speculations which occupied men's minds in the early part of the century.

Jean de Meung's was not the only book of the time which aimed at being an encyclopædia, but it was by far the best known and the most widely *répandu*. There were written towards the close of the thirteenth century certain collections called *trésors*, especially that written by Dante's master, Brunetto Latini, in French, the recollection of which comforted him even in torment. These *trésors* were designed to contain everything that was to be learned, *quicquid scibile*, in mathematics, physics, astronomy, alchemy, music, speculative philosophy, and theology. Readers of old English literature will remember that dreariest of dreary books, Gower's "Confessio Amantis," into which the hapless student plunges without hope, and emerges without profit, having found nothing but vapid imitation, monotonous repetition, and somnolent platitudes. The "Confessio" is a *trésor*, and designed to contain all the science of the time. It is adapted, so far as the

science goes, from a *trésor* called the "Secretum Secretorum."

Liberal thought, in the time of Jean de Meung, did not attack the domain of doctrine, partly, perhaps, from an unwillingness to meet the probable consequences of a charge of heresy; indeed, when doctrine came in its way, it seems to have leaned in the direction of orthodoxy. Thus we find Jean de Meung siding with Guillaume de St.-Amour in an attack on the "Eternal Gospel," that most extraordinary book, ascribed to Joachim, Abbot of Flora;[1] which was intended to have the same relation to Christianity which Christianity bears to Judaism, to be at once its fulfilment and its abolition, which was to inaugurate the third and last, the perfect age, that of the Holy Spirit. The mendicants, an ignorant, credulous body, quite incapable of appreciating the consequence of any teaching, espoused the cause of the book; Guillaume de St.-Amour arraigned them, not only of the ordinary vices attributed to them—vices entirely contrary to their vows—but as preachers of doctrines pernicious, false, and heretical. Probably Jean de Meung was actuated by *esprit de corps*, Guillaume de St.-Amour being a champion of the University of Paris, as well as by hatred to the monks, and, in spite of his hard words, was not moved strongly by any specially inimical feeling towards the book. Following the instincts of his time, however, he flatly ascribes its authorship to the Devil, the alleged author of so many theological books.

In the book occurs a description of Hell, which is curious, as it shows that Dante classified rather than invented the tortures of the circles:—

[1] See "Revue des Deux Mondes," 1866, vol. 64.

What guerdon, he asks, "can the wicked man look for, save the cord which will hang him to the dolorous gibbet of hell? There will he be riveted with everlasting fetters before the prince of devils; there will he be boiled in cauldrons; roasted before and behind; set to revolve, like Ixion, on cutting wheels turned by the paws of devils; tormented with hunger and thirst, and mocked with fruit and water, like Tantalus, or set to roll stones for ever up hill, like Sisyphus.

One thing seems worthy of remark. The place of punishment for the wicked man, in the Middle Ages, was the torture-chamber of their own criminal courts, intensified by imagination. Their punishment was through the senses. Of mental suffering they had no conception. Yet, strangely enough, their Heaven *was never a Heaven of the senses;* and it shows how deeply the world was penetrated with the feeling of Christ's holiness, that while every temptation seemed set to make the mass believe in a Paradise like that of Mahomet, the Heaven of Christendom has always offered, as its chief charm, the worship and praise of a present God. "There, by the fountain of mercy," says Jean de Meung, "shall ye sit":—

> There shall ye taste that spring so fair;
> (Bright are its waters, pure and clear,)
> And never more from death shall shrink,
> If only of that fount you drink.
> But ever still, untired, prolong
> The days with worship, praise, and song.[1]

The poet reserves, however, his chief strength and the main exposition of his views for his character of Faux Semblant—False-seeming—the hypocrite. There

[1] Cf. also Richard of Hampole:—

> Ther is lyf withoute ony deth,
> * * *
> Ae yatte the most sovereign joye of alle
> Is the sight of Goddes bright face,
> In whom resteth alle manere grace.

is dramatic art of the very highest kind in the way in which Faux Semblant draws and develops his own character, pronounces, as it were, the apology of hypocrisy. His painting of the vices of the mendicant orders does not approach those of Walter de Mapes, or of Buchanan, in savage ferocity; but it is more satirical and more subtly venomous, and has the additional bitterness that it is spoken as from *within* the body which he attacks. The others, standing *outside* the monastic orders, point the finger of scorn at them. Jean de Meung makes one of themselves, an unblushing priest, with a candour which almost belongs to an approving conscience, with a chuckling self-complacency and an unconsciousness of the contrast between his life and his profession, which rise to the very first order of satirical writing, depict his own life, and take credit for villanies which he takes care to inform us are common to his order. He has been compared with Friar John; but the animalism and lusty vigour of this holy man lead him to a life of jovial sensuality through sheer ignorance; whereas Faux Semblant, his conscience seared with a hot iron, sins against the light. We may compare, too, the attacks made by Jean de Meung's contemporaries and immediate successors. They never attempt satire of this kind. It was an instrument whose use they could not comprehend. Their line is invective, as when Rutebeuf says, in his straightforward way—

> Papelart et Beguin,
> Ont le siècle honi;

or else the satire of the fabliaux and contes, which is the simple telling of stories discreditable to the clergy.

Faux Semblant, in his sermon, begins by telling his hearers that he lives, by preference, in obscurity, and

may therefore chiefly be found where this is most readily obtained, viz., under a religious habit. With the habit, however, he is far from putting on the reality of religion. He attaches himself to powerful patrons; he goes about preaching poverty, but living on the best of everything; nothing can be more contrary to his experience than that religion is to be found at all under the robe of a monk; nor does it follow that men and women lead bad lives because they wear a worldly garb; very many, indeed, of the saints have been married, were parents of children, and men and women of the world.

He tells how he changes his habit from time to time; how, out of the religious life, he "takes the grain and leaves the straw;" how he hears confessions and grants absolution, as well as any parish priest; but how, unlike the parish priest, he will hear the confessions only of the rich, who can afford to pay; "let me have the fat sheep, and the pastors shall have the lean." So with the poor; he will not help any.

> Let dying beggars cry for aid,
> Naked and cold on dunghill laid:
> There stands the hospital, with door
> Wide open to receive the poor.
> Thither let all who please repair,
> For help nor money can I spare:
> No use for me to save their life:
> *What can he give who sucks his knife?*

Now, with the rich it is different; and the mendicant, while he takes the alms of those whose sins he has heard, may glow with conscious virtue, reflecting that the rich are much more exposed to temptation, and therefore, as a rule, more grievously weighed down with a sense of guilt, than the poor. When

relief can be given, surely it should first be bestowed on those who need it most.

Mendicancy, Faux Semblant acknowledges with an engaging candour, is only right when a man has not learned and cannot learn a trade. Monks ought to earn their bread by labour, and when we are commanded to give all to the poor, it is not meant that we should take it back by begging, but that we should work for our living. But the world, neglecting this among other wholesome rules, has set itself to rob, plunder, and despoil, every man trying to get whatever he can from his neighbour. As for himself, his business, and that of his brethen, is to rob the robber—to spoil the spoiler.

The mendicants keep up their own power by union; if a man does one of them an injury, they all conspire to effect his ruin; if one hates, all hate: if one is refused, all are refused, and revenge is taken: if any man is conspicuous for good deeds, they claim him as their own disciple, and in order to get the praise of people and inspire confidence, they ask, wherever they go, for letters which may testify to their virtue, and make people believe that all goodness abounds in them.

He says that he leaves others to retire into hermitages and caves, preferring to be called the Antichrist of robbers and hypocrites: he proclaims himself a cheat, a rogue, a liar, and a thief: he boasts that his father, Treachery, and himself, rule in every realm, and that in the security of a religious disguise, where no one is likely to suspect him, he contrives various means to charm and deceive the world. Set forth in this bold fashion, the discourse of Faux Semblant loses all its dramatic force. It is fair, however,

to state that this dramatic force is chiefly found in detached passages, and that the sermon is entirely spoiled by the many digressions, notably that on the "Eternal Gospel," which are found in it.

Another long and very curious dissertation, into which there is no space here to enter, is that on predestination, where he arrives at the conclusion that the doctrine must be accepted as a dogma. in Christian faith, but that it need not affect the Christian life—

> For every man, except a fool,
> May guide himself by Virtue's rule.

A conclusion which seems almost to anticipate the compromise arrived at in the Article of the Church of England.

The sum of Jean de Meung's religious teaching is to be found in the sermon of Genius—

> And, lords and ladies, this be sure,
> That those who live good lives and pure;
> Nor from their work and duty shrink,
> Shall of this fountain freely drink.
>
> * * *
>
> To honour Nature never rest,
> *By labour is she honoured best;*
> If others' goods are in your hands,
> Restore them all—so God commands.
> From murder let all men abstain;
> Spotless keep hands, and mouth keep clean.
> Be loyal and compassionate,
> So shall ye pass the heavenly gate.

The one thing insisted on by Jean de Meung is the absolute necessity of a pure life. A profound sense of the beauty of a pure life is, indeed, the key-note to all mediæval heresies and religious excitements. The uncleanness of the clergy was the most terrible weapon wielded by the heresiarchs. Thus, Peter de Brueys

compelled monks to marry. Henry the Deacon taught that the church could exist without priests. Tanchelin of Antwerp held that the validity of the sacraments depended on the holiness of him who administered them. Peter Waldo sent out his disciples two by two, to preach the subversive doctrine that every virtuous man was his own priest; while the Cathari went gladly to the stake in defence of their principle that absolute personal purity was the one thing acceptable to God. The more ignorant the age, the wilder is religious speculation; but in the most ignorant ages, there rises up from time to time a figure with a spiritual insight far beyond that of more learned times. Protestantism in its noblest form has found nothing more sublime than this conception of a church where every good man is a priest; and there is nothing in the history of religious thought more saddening than these efforts of the people, ever hopeless, ever renewed, to protest against dogma, creed, perfunctory and vicarious religion, and to proclaim a religion of personal holiness alone.

Let us turn to the second division. We find the book teeming with a misogyny bitter enough to make us believe that there must have been some personal cause for it. "What is Love?" he asks. "It is a *maladie de pensée*—the dream of a sick fancy . . . . There is a far higher and nobler thing in the friendship of men." And it is after narrating the stories of Penelope and Lucretia, that he puts into the mouth of Jealousy the famous couplet—

> Toutes estes, serez, ou fustes,
> De faict ou de voulenté, putes.

Of course it may be urged that these are the words of Jealousy, and not of the poet; but, unfortunately,

there are so many indications of the author's entire approval of the sentiment, that the plea is hardly worth much. Take, for instance, the dramatic scene, when the wife worms out her husband's secret; or that of the old woman's lesson to Bel Accueil, where, as in the case of Faux Semblant, he puts woman's condemnation in her own mouth. She teaches him the art of love almost in Ovid's own words; she prefaces her lesson by a lament over the past days of youth and beauty; her regrets are not for a life of sin and deceit, but for the past bad days that can come no more. She is steeped in wickedness and intrigue; she can see no happiness, except in love and luxury:—

My days of gladness are no more;
Your joyous time is all before;
Hardly can I, through age and pain,
With staff and crutch my knees sustain.
Almost a child, you hardly know
What things you have to bear and do.
Yet, well I wot, the torch that all
Burns soon or late, on you will fall;
And in that fount where Venus brings
Her maidens, will you drench Love's wings.
But ere you headlong enter, pause,
Listen to one who knows Love's laws.
Perilous are its waters clear;
He risks his life who plunges here
Without a guide. Who follows me
Safe and successful shall he be.

She tells of her vanished youth and all the pleasant follies of her young days; how she threw away her affections on a scoundrel, who only robbed and ill-treated her; how she wasted her money and neglected her chances; how she grew old, and her old friends ceased to knock at her door.

But ah! my child, no one can know,
Save him who feels the bitter woe,

What grief and dolour me befell
At losing what I loved so well.
The honeyed words, the soft caress,
The sweet delight, the sweet embrace;
The kisses sweet so quickly sped,
The joyous time so quickly fled.
Fled! and I left alone to mourn.
Fled! never, never to return.

The whole passage is full of the truest touches of nature, and is written with a *verve* quite extraordinary. Villon has imitated it in his ballad of the *Belle Heaulmière;*[1] and Béranger sings in the same key,—

Combien je regrette
Mon bras si dodu,
Ma jambe bien faite,
Et le temps perdu.

Jean de Meung's old woman is no more repentant than her successors. And she tells Bel Accueil all that Ovid had to impart.

It is quite possible that in putting an imitation of the "Art of Love" into the old woman's mouth, Jean de Meung catered to the lowest tastes of the age, and courted a popularity from this part of his work which

---

[1] Avis m'est que j'oy regretter
La belle qui fust Heaulmière;
Soy jeune fille souhaiter
Et parler en ceste manière.
* * * *
Qu'est devenu ce front poly,
Ces cheveulx blonds, sourcils voultiz,
Grant entr'œil, le regard joly,
Dont prenoye les plus subtils;
Ce beau nez ni grand ni petit;
Ces petites joinctes oreilles;
Menton fourchu, cler vis, traictiz,
Et ces belles lèvres vermeilles?

he might not have obtained from the rest. The same sort of defence—no defence at all, but another and a worse charge—has been set up in the cases of Rabelais and Swift. All such offenders, we are told, deferred to popular opinion, and wrote what they inwardly disapproved. This surely is worse. To be yourself so far depraved as to take delight in things impure is bad; to deliberately lay yourself out to please others with things impure is surely infinitely more wicked. It is *possible* that Jean de Meung, Rabelais, and Swift, did this; but I do not think it probable. In the case of the poet whom we are now considering, there seems every reason to believe that he had formed the lowest possible ideas of love and women; that from the depths of a corrupted morality, which permitted him the same pleasure in impurity which the common herd of the vulgar and illiterate shared, he had eager yearnings for that purity of life which alone, as he felt and preached, could bring one to taste of the heavenly spring. That a man could at the same time grovel so low and look so high, that his gaze upwards was so clear and bright, while his eyes were so often turned earthward, is a singular phenomenon; but it is not a solitary one. Other, greater, men have been as degraded as they were exalted. Perhaps when Christiana and her children saw that vision of the man with the muck-rake, while the angel, unregarded, held the crown of glory over his head, had they looked much longer, they might have seen him drop his rake and gaze upwards, with streaming eyes, upon the proffered glory. Jean de Meung was the man with the muck-rake who sometimes looked upwards.

The poet feels it necessary to apologize for his severity against the sex. "If," he says, "you see

anything here against womankind, blame not the poet."

All this was for instruction writ;
Here are no words of idle wit.
No jealousy inspired the song;
No hatred bears the lines along;
Bad are their hearts, if such there live,
Who villainie to women give.

Only, if aught your sense offend,
Think that to know yourself is good,
And that with this intent, my friend,
I write what else might seem too rude.

He thinks it right, too, to make a sort of apology for the severity of his attack on monks:—

I strung my bow: I bent it well;
And though no saint, the truth to tell,
I let my random arrows fly
In lowly town and cloister high.
For what cared I where'er they lit?
The folk that Christ called hypocrite,
Who here and there are always found,
Who keep their Lent the whole year round,

* * *

But feed on live men's flesh the while
With teeth of envy and of guile,
These were my mark; no other aim
Was mine except to blot their fame.

Let us pass to what is perhaps the most curious part of the book, and the richest for the student of mediæval ideas—that in which he gives us his views on the growth and principles of society. Here are advanced theories of an audacity and apparent originality which make one curious to know how far they penetrated into the lower strata of France; whether they were the speculations of a dreamer, or the tenets of a school; whether there was any connection—it is more than possible—between this kind of teaching and the frantic

revolts of the peasantry; whether, in fact, Jean de Meung was a prophet with a following, or a visionary without disciples. Read, for instance, his account, imitated from the first book of Ovid's Metamorphoses, of the Golden Age:—

Once on a time, in those old years
When lived our grandsires and forbears
(Writers, by whom the tale we know,
And ancient legends, tell us so),
Love was loyal, and true, and good;
The folk was simple; the fare was rude;
They gathered the berries in forest and mead:
For all their meat and all their bread;
They wandered by valley and plain and mountain,
By river and forest and woodland fountain,
Plucking the chestnuts and sweet wild fruits,
Looking for acorns and rustic roots.
They rubbed together the ears of wheat;
They gathered the clustering grape to eat;
Rich fare they made when the forest bees
Filled with honey the hollow trees:
Water their drink; and the strong red wine
Was not yet pressed from the autumn vine.

* * * *

When sleep came with the shades of night,
They spread no beds of down so light,
But stretched in their cabins, on piles of hay,
Fresh gathered grass, and leaves, they lay.
Or slept without—when the air was mild—
And summer winds were hushed and stilled;
When birds in the early morning grey
Awoke to welcome, each in his way,
The dawn that makes all hearts so gay.
In that glad time when the royal pair,
Flora—Queen of the flowers fair—
And Zephyr, her mate, give timely birth
To flowers of spring, through all the earth.

* * * *

. . . . such splendour give
That you might think the world would strive
With Heaven itself for glory—so bright,
So fair, so proud, with its flowers bedight.

Then in the woods they lay at ease,
Over their heads the branching trees—
Lovers kissed, who lovers were,
And kissed again, and had no fear—
Then they chaunted rounds and lays,
Joyously led their sports and plays:
A simple folk; they had no prayer—
No fond ambition—nor other care
Than just to live a life of joy—
And loyal love without annoy.
No king or prince was with them yet
To plunder and wrong, to ravish and fret;
There were no rich, there were no poor,
For no man yet kept his own store:
And well the saying old they knew—
(Wise it is, and is proven true)
Love and Lordship are two—not one:
They cannot abide together, nor mate:
Who wishes to join them is undone,
And who would unite will separate.[1]

Or, as Dryden, who certainly never read the "Romance of the Rose," unless perhaps in Marot's edition, says:—

Love either finds equality, or makes it.

The end of the Golden Age—a thing not generally known—was accelerated by Jason's voyage, the hero bringing home with him treasures from *Outremer:* people begin to get ideas of property: they amass wealth: they rob and fight for plunder: they go so far as *to divide the land.* "La propriété," says Proudhon, "c'est le vol."

Even the ground they parcelled out,
And placed the landmarks all about;
And over these, whene'er they met,
Fierce battle raged. What they could get,
They seized and snatched; and everywhere
The strongest got the biggest share.
* * * *

[1] Non bene conveniunt, nec in unâ sede morantur
Majestas et amor.

So that at length, of plunder tired,
Needs must a guardian should be hired.

* * * *

A sturdy peasant chose they then,
The mightiest of the sons of men;
Strongest in battle or in ring,
And him they took to be their king.

Voltaire has exactly the same idea:

Le premier roi fut un soldat heureux.

This is the origin of royalty. The growth of feudalism, of armies, taxation, and division into classes is carefully traced from these small beginnings.

But he deduces the great law of charity and love for our neighbours. Having this, we have everything; and wanting this, we get wars, tyranny, and all the miseries of the world.

What is the nature of true gentility? Lineage, he explains, has nothing to do with it. None are gentle but those whose virtues make them so. Ancestors may leave their wealth behind them, but not the qualities that made them great. Clerks have an advantage over unlettered persons in knowing what is right. If they are coarse and rude, they sin against greater light, and incur heavier punishment.

Let him, who gentleman would be,
From sloth and idleness keep free;
In arms and study be employed,
And coarse rusticity avoid.
Let him, with humble, courteous grace,
Meet every class in every place;
Honour all women, wife or maid,
So that not too much trust be laid
In woman's faith. So may he steer
Of this great danger wholly clear.

* * * *

Know all, that gentle blood may bring
No benefit, or anything,

Except what each man's worth may give.
Know, also, none of all that live
Can ask for honour, praise, or blame,
By reason of another's name.

The idea, of course, is not new. It is found frequently enough in the Greek and Latin literature. It occurs, I believe, for the first time in the fragments of Epicharmus—

ἀγαθὸς δ' ἀνὴρ
κἂν Αἰθίοψ καὶ δοῦλος, εὐγενὴς ἔφυ—

and afterwards it is found in Euripides, Horace, Juvenal—"Stemmata quid faciunt?"—and, lastly, in Seneca. Doubtless, Jean de Meung took it from Seneca. Once started anew, the idea, of course, became popular, and poet after poet repeated it, until it became a mere commonplace. But, so far as I have been able to discover, it was Jean de Meung who gave it new life.

A few words only on the natural science taught in the "Romance of the Rose." The poet, having got rid of this indignation and wrath that lay at his soul anent the mendicant friars, and the vices of women, wishes now, it seems, to sit down for a quiet and comfortable disquisition on universal knowledge, including alchemy, in which he is a firm believer; indeed, he wants to pass, in a certain ballad of his, for an adept. This part takes the form of a confession of Nature to her chaplain Genius (in which Power afterwards copies him). The confession is long and wearisome, but it is curious as being the earliest and fullest popular account of mediæval science.

He fancies Nature to be perpetually at work, fashioning creatures whom Death continually tries to destroy.

Nature, who fashions all that holds
The sky beneath its ample folds,
Within her forge meanwhile was found,
And at her work's eternal round,—
Struck out new forms of every race,
Lest life should fail, and types should cease;
She made so many, that Death, who toiled
With heavy mace to kill, was foiled.

* * * *

They fly to save themselves, where'er
Their fate may lead or feet may bear;
Some to the church and convent rule,
Some to the dance, some to the school;
Some to their merchandize are turned,
Some to the arts which they have learned.

* * * *

Another, sworn by Holy Writ,
Puts on the cloak of hypocrite;
And, flying, would his thoughts conceal,
Did not his life the truth reveal.
So, shunning Death, do all men shape
Their diverse ways, his blows to 'scape.

The scientific discourse follows: observe the *good sense* of many of his remarks:—

God, having made the world out of nothing, having put all things into their proper places, measured spaces, and allotted courses, handed all over to Nature as his *chambrière*. Whatever man can do—and his power is very great—he cannot equal Nature, the inexhaustible and untiring. By alchemy he can interchange metals; can restore its pristine purity to everything; can turn quicksilver into gold by subtle medicines; but he cannot change or create species. This Nature alone is able to effect, changing the complexions of things, so that they assume new forms and become new substances; as when, in thunderstorms, stones fall from the clouds, where no stones ever were.

The heavens turn every day, bearing with them the stars. They go round from east to west, rejoicing the world. A complete revolution is made every 26,000 years.

The moon is different from the planets in being obscure in some places and clear in others. The reason of this is, that the sun can penetrate through one part of it, as through glass; the dark part, on which is figured a serpent having a tree on his back, reflecting the rays.

In the centre is the sun, like a king. He it is who makes the stars so bright that they serve as lamps of the night; were we nearer to the sun we should be scorched; were we farther away we should be frozen.

The comets are not attached to the heavens, but fly about in the air. They do not last long, and it is a mistake to suppose that they portend disaster. For there is no man of worth or power sufficient for the heavens to take notice of him.

> Nor any prince of so great worth,
> That signs from heaven should give to earth,
> Notice of death for him alone;
> Nor is his body—life once gone—
> Worth one jot more than simple squire,
> Or clerk, or one who works for hire.

Foolish people imagine, too, that stars fall like flying dragons from the skies; and that eclipses are to be taken as portents. Now, no one would be astonished at these things who understood the causes of things.

Every student ought to acquire a knowledge of optics, which can be learned, by the aid of geometry, from the books of Aristotle, Albacen, and Hucayen. Here can be learned the properties of mirrors; how they produce things which appear miracles; make small things seem great—a grain of sand like a mountain; and great things small—a mountain like a grain of sand; how glasses can be used to burn things; how straight lines can be made to look crooked, round things oblong, upright things reversed; and phantoms which do not exist appear to be moving about.

The book from beginning to end is as full of quotations as Burton's "Anatomy." The author quotes from Aristotle, Justinian, Horace, Seneca, St. Augustine, Ovid, Cicero, Boëthius, Lucan, Claudian, Suetonius, and he has, probably through Cicero, some knowledge of Plato, but all this in the wildest jumble, with no discrimination and no critical power whatever. His range of reading was not by any means contemptible, and though I have met with no other writer of his time who can compare with him in this respect, it is evident that since one man had command of so many books, other men must have enjoyed the same advantages.

There is reason to believe from Jean de Meung alone that acquaintance with Latin literature was much more extended than is generally thought, and that the scholarship of the time was by no means wholly confined to scholastic disputation.

Such, roughly sketched, is the work of Jean de Meung, from which I have plucked some of the fruits that come readiest to my hand. If not altogether an original or a profound thinker, he has at least the merit of fearlessness. He taught the folk, in the most popular way possible, great and valuable lessons. He told them that religion is a thing apart from, and independent of, religious profession; that "la robe ne faict pas le moyne;" he says that most of the saints, men and women, were decent married people; that marriage is a laudable and holy custom, that the wealth of monks is a mockery of their profession and a perjury of their vows, that learned persons ought to set an example, and what is sheer ignorance and brutality in others is rank sin with them; he attacks superstition, showing that all phenomena have natural causes, and have nothing to do with earthly events and the fortunes of men, because men are equal in the sight of God; and he teaches, in terms as clear as any used by Carlyle, that labour is noble, and in accordance with the conditions of our being—that man's welfare is the end and aim of all earthly provision.

All this in what used to be called the Dark Ages. After six hundred years, the same questions exercise us which exercised Jean de Meung. We are still disputing as to whether true nobility is inherited or not; we have not all made up our minds about the holiness of marriage; some of us still think the clergyman, because he wears a surplice, holier than other

men; work has been quite recently, and with much solemnity, pronounced noble by a prophet who, which is a thousand pities, forgot while he was about it to call it also respectable; men yet live who look upon scientific men with horror, and quote, with fine infelicity, a text of St. Paul's about "science falsely so called;" while the lesson of personal religion has to be preached again and again, and is generally forgotten in our squabbles over vestments and creeds.

Jean de Meung wished, it seems to me, to write a book for the people, to answer their questions, to warn them of dangers before them, and to instruct their ignorance. On the sapless trunk of a dying and passionless allegory he grafts a living branch which shall bear fruit in the years to come. His poem breathes indeed. Its pulses beat with a warm human life. Its sympathies are with all mankind. The poet has a tear for the poor naked beggars dying on dung-heaps and in the Hôtel-Dieu, and a lash of scorpions for the Levite who goes by on the other side; he teaches the loveliness of friendship; he catches the wordless complaint of the poor, and gives it utterance: he speaks with a scorn which Voltaire only has equalled, and a revolutionary fearlessness surpassing that of D'Alembert or Diderot.

And much more than this. His book—absolutely the only cheerful book of his time—afforded hope that things were not permanent: evil times may change; times have not been always evil; there was once a Golden Age; the troubles of the present are due, not to the innate badness of Nature and the universal unfitness of things, but to certain definite and ascertainable causes. Now, to discover the cause is to go some way towards curing the disease.

In that uneasy time, strange questions and doubts perplexed men's minds—questions of religion and politics, affecting the very foundations of society. They asked themselves *why* things were so; and looking about in the dim twilight of imperfect knowledge, they could find as yet no answer. There was no rest in the church or in the state, and the mind of France—which was the mind of Europe, was gravitating to a social and religious democracy. An hour before the dawn, you may hear the birds in the forest twitter in their sleep: they dream of the day. Europe, at the close of the thirteenth century, was dreaming of the glorious Renaissance, the dawn of the second great day of civilization. Jean de Meung answered the questions of the times with a clearness and accuracy which satisfied, if it did not entirely explain. Five generations passed away before the full burst of light, and he taught them all, with that geniality that is his greatest charm. His book lasted because, confused and without art as it is, it is full of life and cheerfulness and hope. Not one of the poets of his own time has his lightness of heart: despondency and dejection weigh down every one: they alternate between a monotonous song to a mistress, or a complaint for France; and to Jean de Meung they are as the wood-pigeon to the nightingale. They all borrowed from him, or studied him. Charles of Orleans, Villon, Clément Marot, Rabelais, La Fontaine, Regnier, Molière, Béranger, all come down from him in direct line, and are his literary children and grandchildren.

Chapter IV.

EUSTACHE DESCHAMPS.

Priez pour paix doulce vierge Marie,
Priez pour paix le vray trésor de joye.

Charles of Orleans.

DURING the fourteenth century France is in a period of literary decadence. Versifiers there are, but no poets. For the palmy days of chivalry are over, and there are already abundant signs of approaching change. Wycliffe and Huss belong to this age. There is the Jacquerie in France: there are the peasant wars in Germany, and there is Jack Cade in England. In this century there flourished a voluminous "maker," Eustache by name, called, after his estate, Deschamps, and, because he was black of complexion, Morel. He wrote no fewer than 90,000 verses, an amount which represents four times the work of Virgil and twice that of Homer. Of modern writers only Mr. Browning can approach him.

He was born at Vertus, in Champagne, about the year 1340; paternity undiscoverable, probably obscure. He studied at the University of Orleans, and presently got appointed one of the King's Messengers. He

then travelled, visiting Italy, Germany, and Hungary. He even mentions with pride, but perhaps by poetical licence, that he has been a prisoner of the Saracens. Then he became a Court usher, in which capacity his duty was to watch over the personal safety of the King, to act as his escort, and to mount guard at the gates. He was in great Court favour, wrote verses in the highest form of poetry, was a favourite of everybody, married, and had two children, a son and a daughter. He was appointed bailiff to the newly-born Louis, afterwards Duke of Orleans, the same who was assassinated by order of the Duke of Burgundy, and the father of Charles, the poet. Deschamps having observed that at the birth of the Dauphin, three years before, there had been a succession of victories over the English, takes occasion on the auspicious arrival of the second son to prophecy that the two together will effect the total destruction of England. It was an unlucky prediction, because one of the children became Charles the Mad, and the other was murdered. But of course, the prophet was not expected to know that.

King Charles V., wisest of monarchs, temperate in his habits, modest in his surroundings, affable to all, and a patron of learning, is the poet's model of every royal and manly virtue. In the contemplation of this perfection and its illustration in verse, he passed the happy years of his life.

Presently misfortunes fall upon him. His old friend, Guillaume de Machault, the great musician of the fourteenth century, dies; then the King, Charles V., dies; then the English pillage his property at Vertus; and though the new King confirms him in his appointment as "huissier," and promises to indemnify him for his losses at Vertus, no money is forthcoming, as the

Royal treasury was empty. He goes with the King to Flanders, and fights at Rosebecque; then he is made one of the Royal Treasurers, but eight days afterwards, in deference to disagreeable popular opinion as to sinecures, the post is abolished. He is presented, in compensation, with a château, which somebody else, probably the rightful owner, takes from him. Finally, much to his own dislike, he is obliged to retire into private life. He died about the year 1409, after a good long life of dependence and patronage. He had been, it is true, always in favour with the King and the Royal House, but then they never gave him any money. He was also chief literary adviser, adviser laureate, to the Crown: but then the Crown never took his advice.

In regard to his poetry, he is two-faced, like Janus. There is the moral side, and there is the satirical side. As a moralist he presents some rather remarkable points, popularizing in his ballads many of the ideas of the Romance of the Rose. Here, for instance, is one on the duty of work:—

In love or in knighthood; in fray or in hall:
  In labour afield at the plough or the tree:
In robe of the judge, or as king over all,
  In coarse dress of toil on the shore or the sea;
Be it far—be it near—the conclusion of toil,
  Let each bear his burden the length of his day.
Nor for weariness' sake let his handiwork spoil:
  Do all that thou hast to do, happen what may.

Desire not more: be not proud of thine own;
  Look ever on virtue and never on vice:
Leave peace to thy soul: to thy children renown:
  For them, all their honour: for thee, Heaven's price.
God punishes evil: but ever He loves
  For good done on earth better things to repay.
Seek only to conquer where honour approves,
  Do all that thou hast to do, happen what may.

He moralizes in the usual way on the flight of time:

No flower there is, no violet of spring,
  No blossoming eglantine—how sweet it be—
No beauty, goodness, grace, or anything;
  No maid white-limbed; no knight gallant and free:
  Brunette or blonde, comely and strong to see:
Wise, foolish:—nothing in all nature's fold
  But in its own time withers and grows old;
Falling to death in his relentless chace:
  Or being withered suffers scoff and scold.
Vieillesce est fin, et jeunesce est en grace.

We have seen how Jean de Meung revived the old ideas of true nobility, and, like a modern republican, proclaimed the equality of man. Deschamps borrows the idea, and makes a ballad out of it, of which, because it is very curious, you shall have an exact, and not a verse, translation of part.

Adam *loquitur*:—

Children, children, sprung from me, Adam, your first father after God . . . ye are all descended according to the order of Nature from me and from Eve, who was your mother. How is one called villain, and the other gentleman? Ye are all brothers: whence comes nobility? I know not, unless from virtue, and villainy from vice, which wounds all. *Vous estes tous d'une pel revestus.* Puissant kings, counts, dukes, rulers of the people . . . when they are out of their garments, how are they clothed? *With their skins.* Are they any better than the least? Certainly not: they suffer cold and heat, death, sickness and bitterness. Think of your poor estate, and remember, *vous estes tous d'une pel revestus.*"

I find nothing in the moral part of Deschamps which is not also in Jean de Meung. It is true, the mediæval stock-in-trade of ideas is limited at best, and if the older poet had taken all, there was nothing for his followers to do but to work up the old ones in new forms. But Deschamps has one merit peculiarly his own. He is real: he is a practical poet. He leaves the genera-

lities of allegory and attacks particular persons, things, and customs. Thus he is very angry with people who borrow his books and do not return them—a bad habit even now, but doubly bad when books were manuscripts. "I am sick of it," he says, "dolens en sui." He rates the Government over and over again, like an Opposition leading article: they are irresolute: they are afraid: the sailors and soldiers are dishonest: there are rascals and scoundrels in every department of the service: ingratitude is the only reward of faithful services—and so on, till we almost feel that we are in the nineteenth century. And he is as patriotic, particularly after the English have pillaged his farm, as an Alsatian of the present year. He prophecies, for example, with as much earnestness as if he believed himself inspired, the utter destruction of the English power:—

> The French and Scotch, the ancient British race,
> The sons of Brutus in their long array,
> Shall raise their standards in one battle place,
> And fight for conquest on one battle day.
> Rivers of blood, before the day is done,
> Shall flow on either side, but then shall die
> The sons of Brutus with despairing cry,
> And hope of mercy shall there be to none;
> Prostrate and vanquished shall the English lie,
> And men shall say, "This land was Albion."

Like all Frenchmen in all times, he can see no town like Paris. He leaves it with regret: he is never tired of singing its praises: he comes back to it with delight. Next to Paris he loves Rheims, Brussels, Vertus (before the English have come there), and Troye, which he calls "noble cité, ville *très-amoureuse*." And he is always chanting the praises of certain *châteaux*, seeming to love every one better than his own, probably on account of the superior fare he meets with. As for his own, he only

describes its miseries. Early in the morning the rooks begin, wanting to know if it is daybreak already: all day long you hear every kind of bird making a noise: then there are the cows, the calves, and the sheep: with them the bell of the monastery, which drives sick people mad. At night come the owls, with their wailing notes, who frighten those who lie awake out of their senses. And then there are the fleas:—

C'est bien mal duis
A gens qui sont en maladie.

As a traveller, our Eustache is one of those who, like Horace's exile, do not change their temper with the clime. He goes to Germany, where he feels himself no better than a barking dog, not knowing what is said to him and not being understood, except now and then, when he comes across a clerk who knows Latin. After travelling for hours over mountains through ice and snow, you arrive at a miserable roadside inn, where the table-cloth and napkins are dirty, where they put down a dish for ten persons, around which all sit "comme truans," like beggars, digging their fingers up to the third joint in the meat. Remember how Erasmus presents exactly the same picture of a German inn—to be sure, it was only a hundred and fifty years later. Then he goes to Hungary, where, indeed, is real discomfort:—

I have nothing to say about Paradise, because I never was there. As for the other place, I will tell you how to get there. You may go by way of Lombardy, and journey over the mountains to Hungary. There you will find ice and cold the whole year round: ravines deep down in the earth: and no trees but firs. "Le pais est un enfer en ce monde." Chariots and carts cannot pass there, and the sun never shines. Birds there are none, because the cold is too severe for them. The roads are only a foot and a half broad, with a precipice on either hand. If a man falls he is killed. If two horses meet they have to agree which will throw down the other

[this is a fine stroke of humour]. There is no verdure; no vines; no wheat; no stag or doe or wild boar, only bears and chamois; the people seek their nourishment all day, and wherever they can. There are howling winds, darkness, and horrible paths; while Lucifer, King of the Devils, dwells in the peaks and distributes ice and cold to all parts of the world.

Eustache, too much occupied with politics, flattery, and his literary friends (he corresponded with Chaucer), does not devote his attention much to amatory verse. But among his poems is a sweet little "virelay," of which I tender a translation.

Tell me, tell me, am I fair?
Does my mirror show me true?
Sweet of face and blonde of hair—
Tell me—is that so to you?
Tell me, tell me, am I fair?

Grey-blue eyes and eyelids thin,
Clear cut nose and rounded chin,
Slender throat, neck long and white;
Tell me, tell me, am I fair?

Long arms on my moulded breast,
With long fingers, lie at rest,
Tall and slender is my height;
Tell me, tell me, am I fair?

Little feet so smooth and round,
Deftly sandalled, touch the ground;
Blithe and happy do I sing;
Tell me, tell me, am I fair?

Mantles have I, fur and gold,
Robes of satin new and old;
I have many a precious thing;
Tell me, tell me, am I fair?

Brave and proud and happy he,
Who my love may win, shall be.
Was there e'er so sweet a maid?
Tell me, tell me, am I fair?

And my faith, a woman's word,
Pledged as though by Heaven heard,
Never shall be falsely played;
Tell me, tell me, am I fair?

If my lover gentle prove,
Knightly, brave, and true to love,
Slave and servant will I be.
Tell me, tell me, am I fair?

Is there greater bliss in life,
Only own it, than a wife
So endowed, so sweet to see?
Tell me, tell me, am I fair?

I have put Deschamps among my humourists. Obviously, then, some proof must be given of his claim to the title.

I find a ballad, as grimly humorous as can well be devised, close to my hand. The roads at this time were infested with robbers, disbanded soldiers, villagers run away from their homes, deserters, uncaught murderers and thieves. The ballad is called "L'Ordre du Cordier," and depicts the exquisite fun of catching, torturing, and hanging two of these unhappy wretches. It is quite impossible to translate it. Please to take it, for once, in the original.

Dieu gart, monsieur le Bailli!
— A bien soiez, sire prodoms.
Que vous fault? pas m'avez failli,
Si vous voulez: cy est uns homs,
Voire deux, murdriers et larrons.
* * *
Sergens, alez prandre celli
A l'aumusse, nous le voulons,
Et l'autre pour parler à li.
Cez deux mettez en noz prinsons.
— Sire Bailli nous appellons
De ce grief comme torturier.
— C'est bien dit: nous y pourverrons:
Donnez-leur l'ordre du cordier.
Or ça, venez parler à lui:
N'aiez paour. — Nous nous doubtons:
Pourquoy véez la nostre ennemi?
— Dictes voir—chascuns est prodoms.
— Vous mentez: tort les gehinons.

— Haro ! — Qu'as-tu ? — J'ay pis que puce,
Je muir. — Di donc ! — Ha ! sainte Luce !
Certes je suis larron, murdrier :
Bien vouldroie que je mourusse.
— Donnez-leur l'ordre du cordier.
Il l'ara, ses compains aussi.
Or tenez ces deux chaperons :
Estraing. — Haro ! pour Dieu merci,
Vous serrez trop fort les boutons.
— C'est trop tart. — Nous nous repentons,
De confesser ayons induce.
— Il vous vaulsist mieulx estre en Russe ;
Dyables vous firent chevauchier.
Tout homme qui biens d'autruy suce,
Donnez-leur l'ordre du cordier.

He is great on the follies of young men, who, even in the mediæval days, used to sit up late at night and lie in bed till midday; who gave themselves up to all manner of athletic exercises—can we be reading of the fourteenth century?—and wore extravagant clothes, coats too short and hoods too long. As to the women, their extravagances are a great deal worse; they wear their hair plastered and piled up, plaited with paper and relieved and stuck out with pins; they—but in fact, they went on then precisely as they are going on now. One of the most amusing things is a supposed letter from a student to his father:—

My dear father, I have not a penny: nor can I have unless you send it to me. Study is very costly. I cannot use my Code, nor my Digest, because they are dropping to pieces. I owe the provost ten crowns, and no one will lend me the money. The fact is, that if I am to continue my studies, you must send me money to buy books, to pay my fees, and to keep myself. I want decent dress, too, and if you do not want your son to appear a mere clown, you will send me money for that too. Wine is dear; lodgings are dear; everything is dear. I am in debt all round. I fully expect to be excommunicated, and I have already been summoned. If you do not send me some money, I shall be most certainly turned out at Easter.

It is in the "Mirror of Marriage," the last work he wrote, that his satirical talents, and, I think, his poetical powers, are chiefly shown.

Like so many mediæval writers, he proposed to write a satire on women, making it the vehicle of showing all his learning. The ideas are chiefly taken from Jean de Meung, the *communis ager*, but the treatment is his own. And as, fortunately, his own learning was not great, we get a most valuable account, graphic in parts, of life in the fourteenth century. We learn how they lived, what they drank,[1] what they ate, how they dressed, what furniture they had, and, in fact, all the details of bourgeois life. A comfortable, abundant, and cheery life it seems to have been, save for the general uncertainty as regards the English, the way in which the young wives flirted with the chevaliers, and the mothers-in-law.

It runs on in a light, prattling strain, generally vivacious and bright, always pleasant, for some 3,500 lines, when it suddenly comes to an end. Death laid his hand upon the busy hand of Eustache, and he dropped his pen; otherwise, like "The Ring and the Book," or

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[1] The list of wines is instructive:—

Vin de Saint Jehan, et vin d'Espaigne,
Vin de Ryn, et vin d'Alemaigne,
Vin d'Aucerre, et vin de Bourgongne,
Vin de Beaune, et de Gascongne,
Vin de Chabloix, vins de Givry,
Vins de Vertus, vins d'Irancy,
Vins d'Orléans, et de Saint Poursain.

* * * *

Vin d'Ay, vins de la Rochelle,
Garnache fault et Ganachelle,
Vin grec et vin muscadé.

"The Earthly Paradise," no reason on earth why it should not go on for ever, unless the author have mercy.

The luxury of dress at this period was a real and crying evil. Deschamps enumerates, no doubt with exaggeration, the sort of trousseau which a young lady required. Everything seems to have been trimmed with gold. There are mantles of cloth of gold; robes of silk; wreaths and caps trimmed with gold, pearls, and precious stones; tissues of silk and gold; stuffs of blue, green, purple, white, all embroidered with gold; chains of gold and golden studs. Everything is to be of bright colours, for it is an age of splendid colour. Then there must be a horse to ride, and a chariot drawn by four horses, saddles, harness and trappings properly trimmed with gold. And when the wives of lawyers and bourgeois saw these grand things, they naturally fell to desiring them for themselves.

As for the men, they must needs have a squire, a maître d'hôtel, a butler, a femme de chambre, horses and stables, baths, expensive furniture, and for the kitchen three whole pages of curious things, including that expensive luxury, white sugar.

For a good solid standing grievance, there is your mother-in-law. You have got your wife into good order; everything is going well, she is happy and contented, until her mother pays you a visit, and then good-bye to peace. The scene in which the dear old lady "fixes" the son-in-law is worthy of all praise. Nothing so good until Molière put Madame de Sottenville on the stage. Like all Frenchmen, Deschamps takes a keen delight in watching the ways of women with each other. Thus, after church, when they all get round the door and dispute as to who should have the right of going out first:—

"Pass, madame, we wait for you to lead."
"Nay, really, before you I cannot, indeed;
Lady Alice will lead, of course."
"Oh! no. The first place is certainly yours."
"Pass out then, my Lady Babelée."
"I do not presume to lead the way,
But if you insist, by your order I go."
"Nay, rather your courtesy thus to show."
"Indeed, I could not myself, but—well—
Oh! But here is the Lady Isabelle
She will lead." . . . .

But just then somebody recollects that they have forgotten old Lady Sybille, who is hard of hearing, and has not yet finished her prayers. They all go and drag her up from her knees:—

"Get up, Lady Sybille, the ladies wait;
Before you lead none will pass the gate."

Lady Sybille obeys, groaning:—

"O dear, dear, dear, O Sainte Marie!
To wait for a poor old thing like me."

They are all alike, these Frenchmen. Villon used to watch the poor old women in the Halles, sitting round their fire of shavings, and prattling. "Listen," he says, "you will find them as wise as Macrobius." And Coquillart, talking of the way in which they chatter when they get together, says, "Ba, ba, ba, font ses godinettes;" while we all remember Béranger's old women. But none of them excel this little picture of the ladies crowding round the church door, so careful not to make any breach of etiquette, and dragging the old woman away from her prayers to lead the way.

He stops in his satirical course once to sigh after a good wife. He says he will wait,

And never marry till I find
A wife at last made to my mind.
Humble and gentle, soft of speech,
Ready to work, and easy to teach,

Chaste and sweet, of years eighteen,
Rich and well-born, grave of mien,
Kind as a dove and fair to see,
And ready in all to follow me.

* * * *

Ah! send me such a maid for wife,
I should love her above my life.
My days would pass in peace and joy,
Without suspicion or annoy.
Always at ease, always at rest,
No dark forebodings in my breast.
My youth would fly like a happy night,
Dreamed away in a vision bright.
My staff she would be in age, and when
Life at last should pass away,
When I lay forgotten and left by men,
She for the peace of my soul would pray.

Let me give you one more quotation from him on the old, old theme—you will find a specimen in every chapter:—

See how the white rose and the red
Their blossom and their perfume shed
All in a day. The violet,
With sweetest odour richly set,
The daisy and the lily white,
The marigold and iris bright,
They spring and bloom: they have their prime,
They perish e'en in summer time.
And this day's rose, so fresh and sweet,
To morrow dies beneath our feet;
The breezes down the plains that blow,
Strip off their leaves and lay them low.
And day by day, till Martinmas,
Leaf, flower, blossoms, blade of grass,
Wither and die; then comes the frost,
And all the summer grace is lost.
Next winter, with the storm so cold,
Strikes wood and meadow, copse and wold:
Then all is faded, dry, and dead,
We seek in vain: the flowers are fled.

Deschamps is not a joyous poet. The troubles of his country weigh him down. There is a note of sad-

ness in his most cheerful flights. But he is undoubtedly the poet of his century. He shows its magnificence in dress and living, the fearlessness with which all questions were discussed, the liberty enjoyed by the bourgeoisie, the miseries caused by its wars, the rage and despair of the people at their reverses in the English wars, and all the while the calm domestic life going on uninterrupted by external things, where the wife and the husband, with the children and the mother-in-law, make up the little world. History paints this as the worst and most disastrous period that Europe had ever seen; yet here, in the most real poet of the century, we see how life, as a whole, went on in the usual way. For when a great pestilence strikes a country, it slays its thousands and goes away. Time quickly heals the wounds of grief, and the world goes on as before. Then come the English to sack and destroy. Nature heals their wounds, too, by the recurring seasons, and the world goes on as before. I am inclined to think that life, on the whole, was generally pleasant for a well-to-do Frenchman of the period. When bad times came, they were probably worse than those of the present, owing to the existence of thumb-screws, racks, and other ingenious modes then prevalent of driving life slowly out of the criminal; and though it was extremely disagreeable three years ago to be kicked and cuffed by a German boor, things were much harder to bear when you had all this and the thumb-screws as well.

A few words on the greatest friend of Eustache, his master, the poet and musician, Guillaume de Machault. The poetry of Machault is sometimes graceful, but never strong. Like Eustache, and indeed nearly all the mediæval poets, except the fabliaux writers, he is remarkably free from grossness, being essentially a

ladies' poet. I only mention him here in order to give myself an opportunity of telling an episode in his life.

It happened when he was already past fifty years of age, and grievously afflicted with gout. At this mature age love came to him, love in the shape of a fair young princess, Agnes of Navarre, sister to Charles the Bad. She fell in love with him for his verses and his music; wrote to him; begged him to come to her. He could not, by reason of his enemy the gout, accept her gracious invitation at once. But as soon as possible he travelled south and obtained an interview with the young lady, which is described at length by himself in his best verses, where

> . . . many and many a thing we said,
> Too long to write, too long to read.

The Princess received him in the garden, he being accompanied, the prudent man, by his secretary. There, after the many words, Agnes sat down, and, laying her head in his lap, went to sleep, or pretended to go to sleep. Of course, sleep was an accident so very likely to happen. However, in those days of unreal love and unreal gallantry, it passed for the most natural and most proper thing in the world. As soon as her eyes were closed, the crafty young secretary stole softly with a leaf and laid it over the Princess's lips, motioning to his master to kiss the leaf. Pale grew the face of the gouty youth of fifty-five. He bent his head, trembling with ardour, when the young rascal of a secretary suddenly withdrew the leaf, and the lips of our William met those of Agnes. Then she woke up, and scolded in her pretty little way—just as if she had not gone to sleep on purpose—

Elle me dit moult doulcements,
" Amis, moult estes outrageus :
Ne savez vous nulz autres jeus ? "
Mais la belle prist à sourire
De sa très belle bouche me dire,
Et a me fait ymaginer,
Et certainement espérer,
Que ce pas ne li desplaisoit.

Of course it had not displeased her. What young princess could be displeased with so delicate a compliment at once to her rank and her beauty as a kiss on the lips, first reverently covered by a leaf? If any one was to be blamed, of course it was "that boy," the secretary.

Poor little Agnes had not a happy time of it afterwards. Her brother the Bad came to a fitting end, for he was burned while taking a bath of that newly-discovered medicine, brandy. They had wrapped him in a woollen bag, and after sewing him up, steeped the bag in the brandy. Unfortunately the valet who wanted to cut the thread after the operation was completed, could not find the scissors, and applied the candle. The result was the burning of the wicked king. History is silent as to the punishment of the valet, but no doubt it was something exceedingly disagreeable.

As for Agnes, she was married to Gaston Count of Foix, one of those noblemen whose amiability, like that of Bluebeard, did not go far enough to allow any to be wasted at home. Agnes left her husband after some years of brutal treatment. Her boy, young Gaston, stayed behind with his father. He grew up at home, and, wanting above all things to reconcile his separated parents, consulted his uncle, King Charles, who had not yet taken the fatal brandy bath. Charles gave him a potion which he said would turn his father's heart back

to his wife. Home went the poor boy, boasting of what he had got. The Count heard of it, and made a preliminary trial of the potion on a dog, which died straightway; upon which he saw that his brother-in-law had intended, by this horrible device, to poison him, and a wild suspicion seized him that his son was an accomplice. He threw the boy into prison, where he was either starved, as some said, or stabbed by his father, according to others.

It must not be forgotten, in judging of the happiness of the fourteenth century, that such tragedies as these, though more possible than they became later, were rare. These great and puissant princes had no law but their own inclination, and no restraint but their own good nature. Occasionally, therefore, when the spirit and the flesh agreed, and were strong together, there were found wild beasts in high places.

Chapter V.

RABELAIS.

The earth, that's nature's mother, is her tomb;
What is her burying grave, that is her womb.
Romeo and Juliet.

THE common notions of Rabelais are derived partly from Pope's famous line, and partly from the fact of his being generally called the "curé of Meudon," an appointment which he held for less than two years, out of a long life of seventy.

We picture him to ourselves as a jovial priest, whose reputation is by no means doubtful; worshipper of two at least of the Latin deities: one who mumbles a mass and bawls a drinking song; who spends the briefest time possible over vespers and the longest possible over supper; who laughs and mocks at all things human and divine; who is a hog for appetite and a monkey for tricks.

He has been described as a Lutheran and a Catholic; as a great moral teacher, a mere buffoon, and a notorious infidel. And, in a way, he was most of these things, for he was a Catholic, inasmuch as he never left the church in which he was born; he was a Protestant,

in so far as he devoted his best energies to heap contempt on abuses which were the main causes of Protestantism; and he was an infidel within certain limits which I propose to point out. To paint him as a moral teacher alone is to ignore the overwhelming drollery of his character, while to set him up as a mere merry-andrew is to forget the reality—not much like the earnestness of the nineteenth century, but still not so feverish—which underlies his writings, and makes itself felt even when he is laughing with you and for you.

Let us get first at the real story of his life. He was born about the year 1483,[1] in the "garden of France," as he calls it, Touraine, and in the town of Chinon: "ville insigne, ville noble, ville antique, voire première du monde." Here his father kept a hostelry, the "Lamprey," and appears to have had a small farm as well.

A good deal of discussion has been raised as to the quality and condition of his family, but after four hundred years we can afford to be careless about the question. In those days, and indeed long afterwards, meanness of birth furnished a tremendous weapon of offence in literary controversy. They hurled at Rabelais, for instance, the fact of his father having kept an inn, and waited, looking in vain to see him subside. In later years M. Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, M. François-Marie Arouet, and M. Caron de Beaumarchais suffered a good deal from similar taunts; while, before either of these were born, poor Théophile Viaud was reduced to the mere dregs of despair and rage when his enemies contemptuously cut off the last letter of his name, and

[1] This date is disputed, some putting his birth in the year 1495. There does not seem sufficient reason for departing from the received tradition.

so somehow deprived him of his claims to territorial gentility.

François Rabelais, then, was indisputably of the middle class. His father wanted to make him, the youngest of several sons, an ecclesiastic, and sent him at ten years of age to the Benedictine monks of Scully, with whom he stayed until he was removed to the more important convent of Basmette. Here he was allowed full play to his ardour for study, and made certain friendships, destined to stand him in good stead in after years; notably, André Tiraqueau, who helped him in his sorest need; Geoffroi d'Estissac, afterwards Bishop of Maillezais; and the brothers Du Bellay, all of whom became eminent men.

In an evil hour for himself he left his Benedictine friends, and removed to the Franciscan convent of Fontenay le Comte. The Franciscan vow seems to have included ignorance as well as celibacy and poverty, and by no other order was the "new learning" more hated and feared.

He remained in the convent for fifteen years, taking priest's orders in 1511, at the age of twenty-eight. Perhaps by the help of his friends, perhaps by his own ingenuity, he managed to find the materials for carrying on studies which to the Franciscan order were a criminal waste of time, and were, so far as the Greek language was concerned, a deadly sin. He kept up, for instance, a correspondence in Greek with the great Budæus. But his life there was a constant series of mortifications and annoyances. It is to this long period, spent among the most ignorant, the most bigoted, the most narrow of all orders, that we owe his undying hatred of monks. It breaks out in every page of his writings, now passionately, now sorrow-

fully; with a cry of rage, or a laugh of scorn. He hates them more bitterly than even Erasmus, for his nature is stronger; he shows his hatred more bitterly than even Buchanan, for his genius is stronger.

He strikes the key-note in his very first book, the Gargantua:—

"If you conceive how an ape in a family is always mocked and teased, you will easily apprehend how monks are shunned of all men, both young and old. The ape keeps not the house as a dog doth; he draws not in the plough as the ox; he yields neither milk nor wool as the sheep; he carrieth no burthen as a horse doth. . . . After the same manner a monk. He works not as does the peasant; doth not defend the country, as the man of war; cureth not the sick, as the physician; doth neither preach nor teach, as do the good evangelical doctors and schoolmasters; doth not import commodities and things necessary for the commonwealth, as the merchant doth. Therefore is it, that by and of all men they are hooted at and abhorred." "Yea, but," said Grangousier, "they pray to God for us." "Nothing less," answered Gargantua. "True it is, that with a jangling of bells they trouble and disquiet all their neighbours about them." "Truly," said the monk, "a mass, a matin, a vesper well rung is half said." "They mumble great store of legends and psalms, by them not understood; they count plenty of pater-nosters, interlarded with Ave-Maries, without thinking upon or apprehending the meaning of what it is they say. And that I call mocking of God, and not prayers."

It was somewhere about 1520 that the chapter of the convent—one would think they must have had for some time suspicions of the abominable thing going on within their walls—made a sudden raid on the cells of Rabelais and his friend Pierre Lamy, and found there, with horror, books written in Greek, the beloved character of the devil himself. Then a mysterious event occurred, for which no reasons, save vague and incredible reasons, have ever been assigned. Rabelais was condemned to the punishment called "in pace;" that is, to imprisonment in the dungeons of the convent for the whole term of his natural life, on bread and

water. How long he remained in this seclusion we do not know. His friends, and especially Tiraqueau, now Governor of Touraine, getting some inkling of his misfortune, managed, by force, it is said, to get him out. He appears to have then gone into hiding for some time, until, by the special permission of the Pope, in 1524, he passed over to the Benedictine order, into the Abbey of Maillezais. Here he was further permitted to hold whatever benefices might be given him, in spite of his Franciscan vow of poverty.

And so, at the age of forty, he came out into the world comparatively a free man—free, that is, to follow his studies in Greek, Hebrew, philosophy, and natural science. He is burning with that almost pathetic exuberance of enthusiasm for learning which marks the sixteenth century. There is no sacrifice too great for the scholars of his time, provided only they may continue their studies. To be poor is nothing; to live hardly, sleep little, work unceasingly, it is all part of the scholar's life. They will do more—they will give up their independence, be the servants of great men, follow in the train of a bishop or a cardinal; they will hide their thoughts, or only whisper them to each other; they will be outwardly orthodox, supple, submissive, even servile, provided only they may go on reading.

"The old learning," cries Rabelais, "is now restored: the ancient languages (without which it is a shame for anyone to call himself learned) are studied again: Hebrew, Chaldee, Latin. There are correct and beautiful editions printed, an art invented in my own age by divine inspiration, as much as on the other hand artillery is the invention of the devil. All the world is full of learned men, wise teachers, large libraries; and I think that never even in the time of Plato, Cicero, or Papinian, has there been such convenience for study as one sees now. . . . I see brigands, executioners, vagabonds now-a-days more learned than the doctors and preachers when I was young."

Once having got his protection from the Franciscans, Rabelais seems to have cared very little about conciliating the Benedictines. On the contrary, he threw aside the monastic garb altogether, put on that of a secular priest, and became secretary to the Bishop of Maillezais. Perhaps the Benedictines were content to see him go. Indeed, his presence among them would be certainly found to be a *gêne*. It was as if among the magic circle of the Senior Fellows—say, of Trinity—were intruded one whose chief article of belief was that all fellowships should be abolished, and who was known to advocate openly the sale of college livings and the abolition of college feasts.

With the Bishop of Legujé, and with the Du Bellay brothers at Glatigny, Rabelais spent the next ten years of his laborious life, always hard at work, always piling up from the things that went on round him new materials of wrath against the monks, but as yet making no indication of becoming anything else than a scholar, certainly far from suspecting that he was endowed, above all men, with the gift of satire.

Somewhere about 1530 he went to the University of Montpellier with the intention of getting a medical degree. Remark that at this time, when he is following the lectures, he is already forty-seven years of age. But medicine was not a new study for him, and apparently he had already practised in some irregular manner.

His feats—historical and traditional—at Montpellier are too long to narrate; how he was received among them with acclamation; how he pleaded the privileges of the university in—let us say, *n* different languages, the number varying according to the imagination of the narrator; how he wrote and acted farces; how he lectured, and how he laughed.

After two years or so of Montpellier life, he went to Lyons, where he held an appointment as physician to the hospital, and where also he appears to have acted as a corrector for the press, an occupation then taken up exclusively by scholars. Probably he was influenced in his choice of a residence by the fact that his friend Étienne Dolet was already established as a printer in the place. The connection of Rabelais with the first reformers of France is certain; the extent of the connection is extremely difficult to determine. It is clear, however, that he had not the least intention of following Calvin into exile, or Berquin to the stake; that his sympathies were never in favour of any dogmatic creed whatever; and that he found the society of Des Périers, Dolet, and the school of Lyonnais free-thinkers, that most congenial to his habits of thought.

It was here that he published the second volume of the medical letters of Manardi, "Hippocratis et Galeni libri aliquot;" and a forgery, of which he was the dupe, of a Latin will. Finding that the demand for these works was but small, he revenged himself, as tradition, with considerable air of probability, tells us, by writing the "Chronique Gargantuine," which appeared under the imposing title of "Les grandes et inestimables Chroniques du grand et énorme Géant Gargantua, contenant la généalogie, la grandeur de force de son corps," &c. More copies of this extravagance were sold in two months, he says himself, with a mixture of pride and contempt, than of Bibles in nine years. Its appearance was the turning-point of Rabelais' career. Henceforth he will issue no more learned books for the world, he will write to amuse. He permits himself only, by way of distraction from this more serious object, the translation of Marliani's "Topography of

Ancient Rome," and then becomes altogether devoted to the exposition of the Pantagruelian philosophy. In 1533, he brought out the first book of "Pantagruel," which appears as the second in his collected works, and in 1534 he published the "Gargantua," a revised and much altered edition of the "Chronique," which is always printed as his first book.

In the same year he accompanied Jean du Bellay, Bishop of Paris, in his journey to Rome, undertaken to effect a reconciliation, if possible, between Henry VIII. and the Pope. On his return, he published his celebrated "Almanack" for 1535. The unfortunate affair of the placards at Paris happening about this time, Rabelais, as deeply inimical to the Sorbonne as any, thought it prudent, with all the band of *novateurs* and free-thinkers, to go back to Italy till the storm blew over. He chose the safest place in Europe for a man of heretical opinions—Rome: here he obtained permission to lay aside the Benedictine habit, and to practise medicine gratuitously; and as soon as possible he got back to France.

He was now getting old. Peace and tranquillity came to him at last. He got further permission of the Pope to quit the Benedictine order altogether, the habit of which he had previously laid aside. The powerful family Du Bellay protected and loved him. The Cardinal gave him a canonry; Martin du Bellay (the Roi d'Yvetot) entertained him in Normandy, René du Bellay at Maur; and Guillaume du Bellay, Seigneur de Langeay, had the author of "Pantagruel" with him as much as he could.

In 1546 appeared the "third book," protected by royal privilege; and on its appearance, leaving his enemies to do their worst, he went once more to Rome, with Cardinal du Bellay.

Through the influence of Diane de Poitiers, he obtained a privilege from Henry II. for his "fourth book." It was printed in 1552, but prevented by the Sorbonne from appearing till the following year.

In January, 1553, he resigned his living of St. Christophe, which had been given him by René du Bellay. On the 9th of February of the same year he resigned the living of Meudon, which he had held for two years only. His "fourth book" appeared in March, *after he had given up his benefice*, and in April he died.

You know the story, which reads as if it were true, of his last words. He is lying at the point of death. A page enters with a message from some great man. "Tell my lord," says Rabelais, "in what a pleasant frame you found me. I go to seek the great Perhaps." Then a few moments after he says, with his latest breath, "Draw the curtain: the farce is played." He would have said, but for his monkish training, the *comedy*.

It is important to bear in mind, when reading his works, some of their dates:—

1483. His birth.
1533. "Pantagruel," Book I.—commonly called the second book.
1534. "Gargantua."
1546. "Pantagruel," Book II.—called the third book.
1553. "Pantagruel," Book III. — called the fourth.
—— His death.

And, in 1562, appeared the first sixteen chapters of the last book.

The "fourth book," therefore, was given to the world a few days before his death; while the last did not appear till ten years afterwards.

When the first book of "Pantagruel" was written, the author was fifty years of age. It was not the work of a young man; there was no justification for its faults on the score of youth, and no inexperience to plead in modification of its judgments. The wisdom of a life-time spent in study was to be expected; the fruits of many a year's toil; the results of observation of many men and many manners. The age of the author is, indeed, one of the most singular things about it. At a time when most men, dulled by disappointment, and saddened by the loss of all their youthful illusions, begin to fall back upon that gravity of resignation which is one of the saddest properties of age, Rabelais, with the freshness of twenty, but with the wisdom of fifty, begins first to amuse, then to instruct, and finally to laugh at the world. There can be no doubt that his first intention, when he wrote the "Chronique Gargantuine"—a mere farrago of nonsense—was to write a burlesque on the romances of the day, full of giants, knights, and tales of enchantment. Achieving a sudden reputation in a new and hitherto untried line, he continued his tale. But now the impossible becomes, by slow degrees, possible and human: by slow degrees, because he cannot suddenly, not altogether, abandon the burlesque, and because the quaint and misshapen creations of his fancy take time to alter their forms, and become, even approximately, men. Not men and women, because Rabelais has no women in his books. Like Swift, he shows no signs of passion. Unlike Swift, he does not write till an age when the passion of his youth has had time to consume itself in those long days and nights of toil during which he secretly read Plato in the convent cell of Fontenay-le-Comte. Passion was not in Swift's nature; it was killed in Rabelais. The

great fault, common to both, is worse in Swift than in Rabelais, because the former always mixed freely with men and women, while the latter belonged wholly to men. We cannot help a comparison of some sort between the two, but how immeasurably superior is Rabelais in sympathy, in dignity, in power of conception, and in all those finer touches which show the insight of genius.

Not a single woman, except poor Badebec, in all Rabelais. A whole half of humanity absent from his mind. For this, too, we must thank the monks. Love, the source of all human joys and all sympathies, the mainspring of self-denial, the bond of society, the chief lever of civilization, appears in the accursed monastic system nothing but corruption and natural depravity. The discipline of the convent succeeded in killing all this side of their victim's nature. Rabelais never loved. He never even contemplated the possibility of love. He had no more respect for women than an Australian native for his "gin;" no higher idea of women than the chief officer of the Sultan's seraglio. More than this, there has even dropped out of him that divine love for the mother which makes a Frenchman the best son in the world. Alone among French writers, he has no filial piety. As the old galley-slave may be known by the dragging foot, on which was once the fetter, so when the long years have eaten away his youth, imprisoned with its blind instincts and objectless passions, the ex-monk is known by his sexless mind. On this side, and this alone, Rabelais has no sympathy, no perception, no discoverable trace of humanity.[1]

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[1] In one place, indeed, he lets us see plainly his opinion that it is best for a scholar and a philosopher to be alone. "Thus,"

We are reminded, not only of Swift, but also of Cervantes. He, too, resolved on writing a burlesque on romances. Presently the caricatures he has conceived begin to show human properties. The moon-struck madness of Don Quixote is not incompatible with wisdom of the highest kind, chivalry of the highest type. Sancho, who at first follows his master in the hope of bettering his fortunes, follows him afterwards from the noblest sense of affectionate loyalty, when all his hopes of fortune are scattered. And as Pantagruel becomes the wisest of kings, so Don Quixote becomes the knightliest of knights. For life is too serious to make good burlesque writing possible except within very narrow limits; and directly the puppets touch on human interests, they become themselves human.

Impossible as it is to convey to those who do not know Rabelais any adequate conception of the book or the man, let me, keeping the comic element as much as possible out of consideration, try a brief notice of his great work.

The first book treats of the great giant Gargantua, son of Grandgousier (and Gargamelle), his birth, childhood, education, and triumphant victories over King

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he says, "Pallas, goddess of wisdom, guardian of students, is called a virgin. Thus also the Muses are virgins, and the Graces also. And I remember to have read that Cupid, often asked by his mother, Venus, why he doth not attack the Muses, replied that he found them so fair, so virtuous, so continually occupied, one in contemplating the heavens, another in the calculation of numbers, another in poetical composition . . . . that approaching them, he unstrung his bow, shut up his quiver, and extinguished his torch through fear of hurting them. Then he took off the fillet from his eyes, in order to see them more openly, and to hear their pleasant odes and poetic songs, in which he took the greatest pleasure in the world. . . . So far was he from wishing to distract them from their studies."

Picrochole. This book, altered as it is from its original form, is full of absurdities and extravagances. Gargantua rides a great mare to Paris, which by the whisking of her tail knocks down whole forests; he robs Notre Dame of its bells; he combs the cannon balls out of his hair after a battle; he eats up six pilgrims in a salad, who live for some time in the valleys and recesses of his mouth, with other diverting incidents, most of which are to be found in the first edition. The satirical element is much stronger in this book than in the first of "Pantagruel," which, as has been stated, appeared before it. It may be here remarked that nowhere does Rabelais satirize the institution of royalty, or the profession of healing, the two things in the world for which he seems to have had the greatest respect.

Gargantua's education is at first confided to sophisters and schoolmasters. With them he leads the life of a clown. On rising he combs his hair with the German comb, that is, his ten fingers, his preceptors instructing him that to wash and make himself neat is to lose time in this world. Then he gorges himself at breakfast. After breakfast he goes to church, where he hears "six-and-twenty or thirty masses." These despatched, he studies for a paltry half-hour, his heart being in the kitchen. After a huge and Gargantuan dinner, he talks and plays with his attendants. Then he sleeps two or three hours, "without thinking or speaking any harm." After this he drinks, reads a little, visits the kitchen to see what roast meat is on the spit, sups, goes to bed and sleeps till eight. Ponocrates, his new tutor, reforms all this, and, by dint of patience, succeeds in making him forget his old habits. He now rises at four, when he begins the day with

prayer and the Holy Scripture, and spends the morning" —*not a word now of even a single mass*—"in lectures and philosophical discourse. Then to tennis, after which dinner. At dinner, the talk is of the "virtue, propriety, efficacy, and nature of all that was served in at the table . . . by means whereof he learns in a little time all the passages competent for this that are found in Plato, Athenæus, Dioscorides, Julius Pollux, Galen, Porphyrius, Oppian, Polybius, Heliodorus, Aristotle, Ælian, and others."

Then they practise tricks with cards, by which he learns arithmetic ; after this they sing, and then practise horsemanship and all manner of manly exercises. Returning home through the meadows they herborize and study botany, and then, being arrived at their lodging, Gargantua sups, afterwards singing, learning astronomy, or playing cards till bedtime. "Then prayed they unto God the Creator, falling down before Him; and strengthening their faith towards and so glorifying Him for His boundless bounty, and giving thanks to Him for the time that was past, they recommended themselves to the Divine clemency for the future."

The most remarkable chapters in this book (all written for the second edition) are those which describe Friar John's monastery of Thelemé (Θέλημα). This was built and instituted after the holy friar's own scheme, to serve as a model for ever for all future convents. First, there was to be no wall round it; and because in some monasteries they sweep the ground after a woman has crossed it, Friar John ordained that if any regular monk enter the monastery every room through which he has passed shall be thoroughly scrubbed, cleansed, and purified. And as in all convents

everything is done by hours, it is here strictly enjoined that no clock or dial at all be set up. For the occupants, they are to consist of such ladies as are fair, well featured, and of a sweet disposition; and of such men as are comely and well-conditioned. Anybody may go where he or she likes, and they have free permission to marry, to get rich, and generally to do as they please.

The buildings of the monastery, which are more splendid than those of Chantilly or of Chambéry, are described, and the fancy of the writer runs riot in picturing all the splendour, luxury, and comfort he can conceive. Thus, by the river Loire, the Thelemites spend their lives, not by laws and statutes, but according to their own free-will and pleasure. In all their regulations there is but one of universal application—"Do what thou wilt." On the principles of natural religion, or rather of good breeding, is the monastery of Thelemé to be governed, "because men that are free, well-born, well-bred, and conversant in honest companies, have naturally an instinct or spur which prompts them to virtuous actions;" herein the author seeming to get dangerously near the heresy of Pelagius.

The real hero of Rabelais is Pantagruel, son of Gargantua, and not Panurge at all, notwithstanding all that has been said. At the birth of Pantagruel, his mother Badebec dies, so that Gargantua is divided between weeping for grief at the loss of his wife, and rejoicing at the birth of so fair a son:—

"Ah! Badebec, Badebec, my darling, my sweet, never shall I see thee again. Ah! poor Pantagruel, thou hast lost thy good mother."

With these words he cried like a cow, but on a sudden fell a-laughing like a calf when Pantagruel came into his mind. "Ha, my little son," said he, "my childilolly, my dandlichucky, my pretty

rogue. . . . O how jolly thou art! . . . Ho! ho! ho! ho! how glad I am! Let us drink." [1]

The earlier years of Pantagruel, which show too close a connection with the "Chronique Gargantuine," may be passed over. When he grows older he visits the different French universities, Montpellier, Valence, Bourges, Orleans—where he meets the Limousin scholar who talks the new Latin-French—and Paris, which gives the author an opportunity of giving his famous catalogue of the library.

And then comes Gargantua's noble letter to his son, exhorting him to study.

And that which I now write to thee is not so much that thou shouldest live in this virtuous course, as that thou shouldest rejoice in so living and having lived, and cheer thyself up with the like resolution for the future; to the prosecution of which undertaking thou mayest easily remember how that I have spared nothing to see thee once in my life completely well-bred and accomplished; as well in virtue, honesty, and valour, as in all liberal knowledge, and civility: and so to leave thee after my death as a mirror representing the person of myself thy father: and if not so excellent and altogether as I do wish thee, yet such is my desire. . . .

I intend, and will have it so, that thou learn the languages perfectly: first of all, the Greek, as Quintilian will have it; secondly, the Latin; and then the Hebrew, for the Holy Scriptures' sake; and then the Chaldee and Arabic likewise: and that thou frame thy style in Greek in imitation of Plato; and for the Latin, after Cicero. Let there be no history which thou shalt not have ready in thy memory;—unto the prosecuting of which design, books of cosmography will be very conducible, and help thee much. Of the liberal arts of geometry, arithmetic and music, I gave thee some taste when thou wert yet little, and not above five or six years old. Proceed further in them, and learn the remainder if thou canst. As for astronomy, study all the rules thereof. Let pass, nevertheless, divining astrology, and the art of Lullius, as being nothing else but plain abuses and vanities. As for the civil law,

[1] The name of Pantagruel is derived from *πάντα*, says Rabelais, and *gruel*, which "in the Hagarene language doth signify *thirsty*."

of that I would have thee to know the texts by heart, and then to compare them with philosophy.

Now, in matter of the knowledge of the works of nature, I would have thee give thyself curiously; that so there be no sea, river, nor fountain, of which thou dost not know the fishes; all the fowls of the air; all the trees, whether in forest or orchards; all the herbs of the earth; all the metals that are hid within the bowels of the earth; together with the precious stones that are to be seen in the east and south of the world. Let nothing of all these be unknown to thee. And at some of the hours of the day apply thy mind to the study of the Holy Scriptures; first, in Greek, the New Testament, with the Epistles of the Apostles; and then the Old Testament in Hebrew. In brief, let me see thee an abyss of knowledge: for from henceforward, as thou growest great and becomest a man, thou must part from this tranquillity and art of study, thou must learn chivalry, warfare, and the exercises of the field, the better thereby to defend my house and to succour our friends in all their needs, against the assaults of evil doers.

But because, as the wise man Solomon saith, Wisdom entereth not into a malicious mind, and knowledge without conscience is but the ruin of the soul; it behoveth thee to serve, to love, to fear God, and on him to cast all thy thoughts and all thy hope, and, by faith formed in charity, to cleave unto him, so that thou mayest never be separated from him by thy sins. . . . And, when thou shalt see that thou hast attained to all the knowledge that is to be acquired in that part, return unto me, that I may see thee, and give thee my blessing before I die.

Under Epistemon, his tutor, Pantagruel makes rapid progress in study. In Paris he meets Panurge, who addresses him in thirteen different languages, the author probably bearing in mind a similar feat of his own, when he pleaded the cause of the Montpellier University. He hears and decides a cause in which the pleadings are given with great prolixity of nonsense on either side. Then we have the mischiefs of Panurge, the victories of Pantagruel, and the descent of Epistemon to the nether regions. This book, indeed, is the only really mirthful one in Rabelais. It was the natural sequel and development of the "Chronique Gargantuine." There is very little satire in it, and no

malice; he leaves the monks alone, and only makes fair game of the pedantry of the lawyers and the follies of the university.

It is not difficult to construct, from this book alone, a sort of master-key to the whole. Thus Pantagruel is he who collects the wisdom and knowledge of his councillors, and applies them to the practical purposes of life. Epistemon, his tutor, represents scholarship and learning; Eusthenes, the right application of strength. Friar John is the soldier and man of action, spoiled by the monkish robe. Panurge—πάνουργος—what may he not represent? He is intellect, unaided by rank or wealth. He is intellect without moral principle. He is cunning, without forethought; audacious, without bravery. He is a spendthrift, contriver, libertine, scholar, coward, wit. He has no pity, no sympathy, no shame, no reverence; he has no virtues at all. He has no strength, only craft; no affection, save for what will help him. Pantagruel is a great king, and Friar John a lusty comrade. But if John gets old and Pantagruel weak, Panurge will betake himself to the nearest available protector, and be as full of animal spirits, as jovial, as reckless as ever. Panurge is a man with every faculty, but *without a soul.*

I know that this kind of allegorizing is dangerous, and may be carried very far beyond what was ever intended. Still I have little doubt that some such scheme, over and above the first idea of a burlesque, was in the mind of Rabelais. Mere fooling, to a man so learned, would have been simply impossible, and his genius is nowhere so conspicuous as in the exquisitely human touches of tenderness and sympathy that light up his pages. But there is this one character that has neither sympathy nor tenderness, and I am more and

more convinced that in Panurge Rabelais seriously designed to show to the world man, in his highest development of intellect, but with no soul—stripped of that divine element which gives him, alone in the world, the power of sympathy. It would be vain to follow up the allegory, always sitting loosely upon him, in his last two books deliberately neglected in order to satirize the church ; and all his characters, except Panurge and Pantagruel, sink into insignificance when they visit the islands of Papimanie and Papefigue, and the abode of the great Pope-hawk.

Panurge, then, is not the hero of Rabelais. It is the consistency of his character alone, and the prominent part he plays, that has led critics to forget his real subordination to the leading figure of the group; and the majestic conception of Pantagruel, wise and calm, is only brought into stronger relief by the turbulent boisterousness of his follower.

We may put aside, too, as wholly absurd, the old idea that the work depicts the living personages of the time. Nothing can be sillier than the so-called keys to Rabelais. Allusions, it is true, are constantly being made to topics of the day, to local gossip, and contemporary anecdote. In the details of the book, as well as in its spirit, there is a flood of light thrown upon the thought of the time—a time more abundantly illustrated than almost any other. Indeed, from Brantôme, Marot, Des Périers, Rabelais, and Erasmus, the first fifty years of that remarkable century might be reproduced with a vividness and fidelity to which I think no other period, unless it be the last century, presents a parallel.

The third book opens with Panurge's prodigality, after Pantagruel had given him the lordship of Salmy-

gondin, and his discourse on the pleasure and profit of being in debt.

"Be pleased to represent unto your fancy another world, wherein everyone lendeth and everyone oweth, and all are debtors and all creditors. What would be the harmony among the regular movements of the heavens! I think I hear it as well as ever Plato did. What sympathy between the elements! . . . . I lose myself in the contemplation. Among men, peace, honour, love, fidelity, repose, banquets, feasts, joy, delight; gold, silver, small money, chains, rings, merchandise will run from hand to hand. No lawsuits; no war; no disputes; no one then will be a usurer, a miser, avaricious, or a refuser of loans. Good God! will it not be the age of gold—the kingdom of Saturn—the idea of the Olympic regions, in which all other virtues cease, and Charity alone is regent, mistress, queen?"

Then come Panurge's grave doubts on the subject of marriage, and the incomparable chapter where he sets forth his difficulties to Pantagruel, receiving from him the alternate advice, "Marry, then," and "Then do not marry."

The rest of the book is chiefly made up of the advice given to Panurge by different councillors, none of whom advances his cause at all. Here, too, occurs the case of Judge Bridoise—without any exception, the finest piece of comedy in the whole of Rabelais. The humour consists not so much in making the poor old judge, against whom an appeal has been lodged, confess that he decided this case, and has decided all others during his whole life, by the throw of the dice, keeping big dice for important cases, and small dice for trifling ones, as in the judge's perfect incapacity to see any reason for concealing the fact, or any other method of arriving at perfect justice and fair dealing, and his inability to make any other defence than that, by reason of the infirmity of age, he might be prevented from rightly discerning the points of the dice, and so the course of justice be diverted.

The Sorbonne could find nothing in the third book to complain of. In one chapter, the word *âne* was printed no less than three times instead of *âme;* but King Francis refused to sanction its prohibition on that account, and the book appeared *Cum privilegio.*

Now Rabelais had little of the spirit of a martyr in him. There was probably no form of religion for which he would have gone to the stake, or even, willingly, to prison; martyrdom would have been just as disagreeable to him whether at the hands of the monks or the Calvinists. Both parties would certainly have burned him, had they been able, with a lively joy; Calvin out of the malice of a disposition rendered morbid by bodily suffering and wounded personal vanity, and the monks out of pure revenge on a man who had done more than any other man, living or dead—Walter de Mapes and Jean de Meung not excepted—to bring them into contempt.

There must have been some protector at court on whom Rabelais relied when he resolved on issuing his fourth book; else we must believe that in his old age he committed the only imprudent act of his life; and, after dexterously avoiding his enemies for seventy years, voluntarily put his head into the lion's mouth. He died, but that was unforeseen; and we may picture the rage of the orthodox when their old enemy, now almost within their grasp, slipped quietly out of their hands. The church never forgets, and priests never forgive; perhaps it was well for the writer that his life was not prolonged beyond his threescore years and ten.

To the protection of the Du Bellay family, he added that of Cardinal Odet. He it was, I think, who subsequently became a professed Protestant, and took a wife. There must have been others, and the nature of the

work must have been perfectly known to them; for now an obvious change comes over the spirit of the book. It is no longer the pure spirit of drollery; there is no more tenderness; the old geniality seems gone out of it; the animal spirits of the old man are dying out; the fire of his resentment mounts higher; all is fierce, vehement, bitter satire: he laughs, with a gibe at the monks; he moralizes, with a jest on the priests.

The last book may be taken with the fourth, though it did not appear till ten years after the death of the writer, and then without his final touches and corrections. It lacks these; its bitterness is too keen; it has no geniality at all, though it wants some, if only to set off and heighten the boundless measure of its contempt for monks and priests.

In the fourth book, however, we are not wholly without fun. There we may read several very good stories: how Panurge bargained for the sheep; how the Lord de Basché struck a wholesome terror into bailiffs; how Francis Villon was revenged on Friar Tickletoby; how the great storm fell upon them, with the cowardly conduct of Panurge; and how the frozen words fell on the deck, and melted, and were heard. Here, indeed, are goodly materials for mirth. But the tone of the whole is somehow changed.

They visit, during this Odyssean voyage, the island of Shrovetide, the island of Papefigue, the inhabitants of which, though once rich, were now poor, wretched, and subject to the Papimanes. Then they go to the island of Papimanie—"navigasmes par ung jour en sérénité et tout plaisir, quand à nostre veue s'offrit la benoiste isle des Papimanes,"—and observe the calm weather which always reigns round the island of the orthodox. When they near the shore, a boat puts off,

to ask them, "Have they seen him?" "Seen whom?" asks Pantagruel. "Him!" they repeat. "Who is he?" quoth Friar John. "Par la mort beuf! I will smash him," thinking it had been some notorious criminal. "How!" cried they in the boat, "do you not know, gentlemen pilgrims, the Only One (l'Unique)? Nous parlons du Dieu en terre." "Upon my word," says Carpalim, "they mean the Pope." "Oh, yes!" says Pantagruel, "I have seen three of them; much better am I for the sight. One at a time, understand." "O folk thrice and four times happy!" they cry, "welcome and more than welcome." "Then they knelt down before us, and wished to kiss our feet."

Then they were entertained by Homenas, who sets forth the praise of the decretals, and how they gather gold for Rome.

Next they go to the court of the great inventor Gaster, the first Master of Arts in the world. There, in the liveliest allegory, Rabelais shows how necessity and self-preservation are the parents of all arts and sciences, and how from the mere want of food springs every development of the ingenuity of man.

The purpose of the writer grows wider still in the last, imperfect book. They go to the isle of Bells (l'île Sonnante), where the single Pope-hawk lives with clergy-hawks, monk-hawks, priest-hawks, abbot-hawks, bishop-hawks, and cardinal-hawks. These birds are all of strange birth. They are imported from the land of Lack-bread, and never go back. They sing at the ringing of bells; they lead joyous and happy lives, "but nothing to what we shall have," says Ædituus, "in the other world;" and they are all sacred, and not to be touched on pain of fearful punishments. Here, without the least disguise, the church is described.

Then to other islands, including that of Grippeminaud, the Inquisitor, and so on to the last, the Oracle of the Bottle.

We see, then, in Rabelais, three stages: simple burlesque, allegory and satire almost unmixed. He has the same purpose throughout, but it grows. While at first he attacks monks only, he afterwards aims at the follies of the whole church, and even at the court and constitution of Rome, finishing the whole with the oracle which relieves Pantagruel's mind, and sums up the Pantagruelian philosophy by the magic word, "Drink."

"Now," says the priestess, "you may depart, my friends, under the protection of that intellectual sphere whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere, which we call GOD. Go, by command of God who leads you, to God. When you return to the world, do not fail to affirm that the greatest treasures are hidden underground; and not without reason."

The controversies of the time, the endless disputes of the schools, the differences of churches—what were they to men who could feed on Plato, and roam over the flowery fields of ancient philosophy? What was it to them whether the bigot of Geneva, or the bigot of Rome, conquered? What to them the issue of questions as idle as the bells of *l'île Sonnante*, as meaningless as the frozen words on the deck of Pantagruel's ship? The spirit of priesthood—*that* had been the enemy of philosophy in old times, and was its enemy in the new times; its fanaticism, its blind fear of ignorance were their natural foes; the long chain of custom, the fetter that bound men's souls to decaying forms, was what they would fain, but could not, remove. Life might be cheered by the intercourse of scholars; but life with

the common herd, with the so-called religious, or the so-called learned, was intolerable, ludicrous, stupid. As for the doctrines of the church—well, they are good for the common people. Meanwhile, the great God reigns: he is like a sphere whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere. The ministers of religion are its worst enemies: he who is wise will be tied by as few dogmas as may be, but he will possess his soul in patience; and after seventy years of study, thought, and labour, will accept the sacraments in the usual way, with one last parting insult for the priest who brings them.

This is the Pantagruelian philosophy, which was professed by no small number of scholars. It was no mere name, or peg, on which to hang a string of trifles. It was followed by those who felt, with Rabelais, that to promote learning was to promote progress; that to remonstrate against evils which spring mainly from ignorance is futile. Hence, they passed their lives in unprotesting acquiescence, content to feel that the things they knew would grow and spread more and more. There are few scholars now to compare with those of the sixteenth century. What men could learn they learned. Not the whole circle of science only, but the whole circle of languages, in which literature worth the reading was to be found, was theirs. Rabelais was botanist, physician, and astronomer. He knew Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, and Italian; perhaps, also, for the only limit to his power of acquisition was that imposed by the dial, he knew all those other languages in which Panurge addresses Pantagruel. But while their learning was great, their numbers were small. They lived their own lives; few of them shared in the ambitions and hopes of other men: they were

men of the cloister, not of the outer world. As for this outer world, it was a seething mass of brutality, ignorance, and superstition. They knew, out of those Greek volumes which monks regarded with such just suspicion, how dark their own time was, compared with that which had been. They knew well enough that the ceremonies which men were taught to believe God-sent, were copies and relics of paganism; they saw the *Dii minores* in the saints, the cult of Venus in that of the Virgin, the Pontifex Maximus in the Pope.

Some of them, among whom was Clement Marot, one of the philosophers, though no scholar, laughed and made sport of all the turmoil about religion; some, notably the Cardinal du Bellay, gravely held their tongues; some, among them Bishop de Saint Gelais (not Octavien, or Mellin, the poets), went over to the Protestants; some, among whom was poor Etienne Dolet, talked, and got burnt for their pains; one or two, among whom was Bonaventure Des Périers, broke out into open infidelity; while others, More, Erasmus, and Rabelais the chief, attacked the abuses but remained in the church, which was indeed their only camp of refuge. For them Calvin would have been a more intolerant master than the great Pope-hawk himself, and they were not the men to exchange one yoke, however galling, for another that would gall them worse in a different place. Is it too much to say, with the examples before us, that the leading intellect of the time remained with the ancient church?

Some men there are who seem too great for creeds. If they remain in the church wherein they were born, it is because in no other would they find relief from the fetters of doctrine, and because the main things which underlie Articles are common to all churches,

in which the dogmas are the accidents of time and circumstance.

This, however, is touching on dangerous ground. Rabelais and his friends went further than contempt for the trappings of modern religion. They rejected it altogether. There can be no doubt, not the slightest doubt, that Rabelais, like Dolet and Des Périers, was a pure and simple Deist. Des Périers, indeed, deliberately divulges, in the "Cymbalum Mundi," the secret creed of his associates. It appears, to intelligent Christians, dreary and dark enough; to non-intelligent Christians, that is, to the greater part of the world, absolute blasphemy. "In this great and wonderful world," Rabelais might have said, "I see everywhere the mark of a mind whose grandeur is beyond anything which the human intellect can conceive. In the wondrous formation of the body, in the courses of the seasons, in the instincts of animals, in the great and awful mysteries of birth and death, in growth and decay, in the annual sleep of the world and its annual waking, in everything upon the earth, above it, and beneath it, I see benevolence, forethought, care for the happiness of creation. In the investigation of the laws which govern the world, I see the only hope of improving men's lives, shortening their pains, increasing their joys. To search for the secrets of Nature is the work of our days, as to cultivate the pure intellect was the work of the ancients. Nature on the one hand: Plato and Cicero on the other hand. Beyond these, what? Only the silence of the grave. To all our questioning, no answer; to all our passionate longing, no lifting of the curtain. Light and joy beneath the sun; on *that* side what awaits? Let us go on in the protection of that intellectual sphere whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere,

which we call God. We have no revelation; we have but one hope, that since the things required for our life are made so incomparably well, the benevolence of the Creator will continue, should existence continue, beyond the grave."[1]

Not a Christian. I am certain that Rabelais was not a Christian. And yet he never satirizes Christianity, because he sees that, right or wrong, it is good for the people to have the definite laws of a dogmatic religion. He saw the evils of the church, but he hoped to help their cure; not directly, by schism, by any kicking against the huge fabric he could not overthrow; but indirectly, by spreading the cause of learning, by bringing monasticism into contempt, by widening the boundaries of thought, and leading the world through laughter rather than censure. He wholly failed, because men, as a rule, not humorous by nature, cannot be led by laughter, and because he profaned the sacred precincts of the temple by buffooneries which other men practise outside.

Of his erudition, as shown in the book, I have given no examples, but he *knew more* than any other man of the time; I have not said, indeed, a tenth part of what might be written of him. It is not impossible that England will yet learn to appreciate more largely this glorious wit and satirist. There may be found some

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[1] This is what he might have said; hear what he actually does say. "Physis, that is, Nature, at first begat spontaneously beauty and harmony, being of herself fertile and fecund. Antiphysis, who is always the antagonist of nature, immediately conceived an envy of this birth, and in her turn produced deformity and discord.... Since then she begat the *cagots* and *papelards*, the demoniacal Calvins, impostors of Geneva, church vermin, and other monsters deformed and framed contrary to nature."

man who has the leisure, and to whom it would be a labour of love, to edit for modern readers the life and voyages of Pantagruel. The necessary omissions could be made without very great difficulty, and the parts to be left out are not inwoven with the web of the whole.

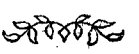
Considering him as a moral teacher, we must remember what things he taught, and that *he was the first to teach them* in the vernacular. Many of his precepts are now commonplaces, texts for the copy-book. But they were not so then. In that time, when only a few had learning, and the old mediæval darkness was still over the minds of men, we must remember what things, perfectly new and previously unsuspected, he poured into men's ears. He showed them what a monastery might be, the home of culture, letters, good manners, and gentle life. He taught the value of learning by direct admonition, in the letter of Gargantua, of which I have extracted a piece, and by the example of Pantagruel: the value of good breeding, if with only a small tincture of letters, in Gargantua: against the solid arts he contrasts the follies of alchemists, astrologers, and foolish inventors: he shows that Necessity, against which we pray so fondly, is in reality the parent and founder of all that men have achieved—great Gaster is the first Master of Arts. In brave stolid Friar John he shows a nature open and manly in all except where the monks have spoiled him. He exposes, from the height of his own learning, the shallow pedantry of the schools, and the folly of the people who forget God in their reverence for the Pope; he paints, in his wondrous panorama of life, the foolish judge, the greedy priest, the cruel inquisition, the lawyer with his false rhetoric, and the needy adventurer with his shifts, turns, and wiles: against all these he sets his wise and tranquil king,

whom no storms terrify, no clamours disquiet. I wish there had been one, only one good priest, with one good woman, so that we might extend over Rabelais that veil of perfect charity which should have covered all his faults. But priests he hated and women he suspected. The robe he wore was to him like a bodily deformity—it corrupted his mind and narrowed his views.. It would be easy to illustrate his wit, his humour, his headlong fun, and that easy jovial spirit which probably rendered him during the whole of his long life—save when he was munching his crust *in pace* at Fontenay-le-Comte—the happiest of his kind. But I would rather, in writing about Rabelais, dwell upon that side of his character which made him a teacher the like of whom Europe had not yet seen.

A great moral teacher. Yes. But it would have been better for France if his book, tied to a millstone, had been hurled into the sea. Not on account of the just and obvious charge which any one who opens its pages will bring against it. That is nothing. The filth and dirt of Rabelais do not *take hold* of the mind —a little cold water washes all off. I have said above that he wholly failed in his purpose ; he did more, he greatly sinned, in a manner which has never yet been pointed out. He destroyed effectually, perhaps for centuries yet to come, earnestness in France. He found men craving for a better faith, believing that it was to be found, and left them doubting whether any system in the world could give it. Great and noble as are many of the passages in Rabelais, profoundly wise as he was, I do believe that no writer who ever lived has inflicted such lasting injury on his country.

As for his fault of coarseness, his biographers defend it on the usual ground—taste of the age, and so forth.

Rubbish! Where is the "taste of the age" in Erasmus? There has been no time in the world's history, from Catullus downwards, when those who have sinned in this way have done so in deference to the "taste of the age."



NOTE ON LUCIAN'S TRUE HISTORY.

THE voyage of Pantagruel is borrowed, in many of its details as well as in the leading idea, from the very curious "True History" of Lucian, the real origin of so many fabulous voyages and travels. Lucian's Gulliver begins by setting sail from Cadiz with exactly the same desire as animated Columbus; he wanted to find out what lay beyond the western ocean. He took with him fifty stalwart companions and a trusty pilot; had a large and stout vessel, which he provisioned with stores which would serve them a long time. After encountering a storm which lasts eighty days, they arrive at a hilly and richly-wooded island, where they found a pillar of brass with an inscription in Greek, "Thus far came Bacchus and Hercules." Two footprints, one of enormous size, marked the farthest step of the god and hero. The rivers of the island flow with wine, not water; the clusters of grapes yield pure wine; then there were women who below the waist were mere vine trunks, and who, when two of his companions tried to kiss them, clasped them tight in their tendrils and transformed them into vines. So in the seventh circle of Dante's "Inferno," Jacopo is transformed into a bush which, as in Lucian, screamed with pain when any twig or branch was broken off.

Sailing away from the island the ship is caught by a whirlwind, which carries it up three thousand stadia into the air. The adventures of the crew become now exciting indeed. They sail to the moon, and being received hospitably by King Endymion, enlist as volunteers in the war which he is about to wage with King Phaëthon. Endymion's forces consist, among other troops, of eighty thousand Hippogyps, *i. e.* warriors who bestride vultures, each with three heads, so vast, that every feather is as big as a ship's mast; of twenty thousand mounted on "cabbage-fowl," *i. e.* birds whose wings are like lettuces—and so on. Phaëthon's forces are described in the same way. The engagement ends in the total defeat and discomfiture of Endymion, who makes haste to accept the most

humiliating terms. The Greek sailors are taken prisoners, but are speedily released by Phaëthon, who allows them to go on their way. As for the manners of the moon-men, they have been repeatedly described since the time of Lucian; but perhaps his narrative has the merit of the greatest originality. They, the subjects of Endymion, do not die, but vanish when the time of death approaches. They do not eat or drink, as we do, only dine off the odour of a roasted frog, or drink the air squeezed into a goblet. To be esteemed beautiful you must be bald. They extract oil from onions; get pure water from their grapes; wear no pockets, being provided with a pouch like the kangaroo; the rich have garments of glass, the poor of brass. The country abounds in minerals and ores, which are worked by pouring water on them. To preserve their sight they take out their eyes, and only use them when they please, the rich buying up the spare eyes of the poor, and so on, many details of which have been imitated by Rabelais.

Leaving the moon, they come next to the City of Lanterns (see Pantagruel, v. 32, 33), Lychnopolis, where they land and see many curious things. After several other adventures they meet with the great misfortune of the voyage, being swallowed up by an enormous whale, three hundred miles long, at one gulp, ship and all. Getting inside they can at first (see Gargantua, chap. 38) see nothing at all, but gradually perceive that they are in a vast cavity. All about them lie bones of fish and men, ships with their cargoes, sails, masts, skins and skulls of beasts. This is near the throat of the monster. Sailing further on they arrive at a small island, forty-five miles round, with hills and valleys, forest trees, singing birds, and fountains. On landing they discovered a small pillar erected to Neptune, and presently came upon an old man and his son, the last survivors of a mishap exactly like their own, who had lived on the island for twenty years. They were very well off, having cultivated the ground about their hut, and being able to fish in a salt-water lake in the island, but with one drawback—the other inhabitants, of whom there were about a thousand. The new comers rid them of these, and they all sit down to enjoy what good things are left to them. After a long imprisonment the idea occurs to them to effect their escape by setting fire to the forest. They do so. After the wood has burned for a few days, the monster grows uneasy, sickens rapidly, and dies. They prop his jaws up with beams of timber, and sail out again, the two original prisoners accompanying them.

There were other adventures doing equal credit to Lucian's imaginative faculty. They get into a frozen sea, where they dig a cave and live in the ice; they arrive at the sea of milk, with its island of cheese; the salt sea where men have feet made of cork, and skim about; and then the Island of the Blessed, where, after

being subjected to a good deal of unpleasant questioning by Rhadamanthus, they are allowed to stay for some months. It is a pleasant place. The city has palaces of gold and ramparts of emerald; its gates are of cinnamon-wood; its pavements are of ivory; its temples are built of beryl, with altars of amethyst; there are crystal baths, and round the city flows a stream of rose-water. They dress in purple; they drink of the three hundred and sixty-five fountains of water, honey, and essences. If they go outside the walls it is to lie in beds of flowers, while the nightingales drop roses on their heads, and choirs of sweet-voiced boys and girls sing to them. All the demigods are there, and all the old philosophers. Socrates, it is true, is in temporary disgrace, having been informed by Rhadamanthus that his flirtations and levities may be carried too far. Diogenes is so far changed that he is married to Laïs, and has taken to drink. Plato is set on an island by himself, where he makes laws for ever. The Stoics are not admitted, and are still all climbing up the steep slopes of the Hill of Virtue, while the Academics, who would like to come in, are excluded on account of their having denied the existence of the place.

But an unpleasant incident disturbs their happiness. Cinyrus, son of the old man above mentioned as the original prisoner, begins a flirtation with Helen—Menelaus, as usual, seeing nothing. He carries it so far as to propose an elopement, and actually puts her on board the ship and sails away. There is a great commotion among the heroes. They sail after the couple and presently bring them back, Helen in tears and Cinyrus in despair. The latter is sent off to Rhadamanthus for sentence.

After this they all sail away again. In a short time they come to a fog which smells like a mixture of burning asphalte, brimstone, pitch, and roasted flesh. It is a dark and murky atmosphere. There are howls, and cries, and the crack of whips. Alas! it is one of the islands of the accursed. They land. No tree grows—it really reads like the mediæval Place of Torment. Swords and daggers are stuck in the ground, point uppermost, instead of flowers; there are three rivers circling round it, respectively flowing with mire, blood, and fire. And here is poor Cinyrus, the last seducer of Helen, hung up over a slow fire and roasting like a modern Huguenot. Gulliver takes occasion to remark, piously, that he is glad to see liars and false historians in the hottest places.

Thence to the Island of Oceanus, with four gates, not two, as Homer superficially observed. The bad dreams pass through two gates of iron and potter's clay respectively; the pleasant dreams through those of iron and ivory.

And a little more in the same style, the history abruptly winding up, as such histories might, with the promise of more next time.

Chapter VI.

MONTAIGNE.

Frui paratis et valido mihi,
Latoë, dones ; et precor, integrâ
Cum mente, nec turpem senectam
Degere, nec citharâ carentem.
Hor. *Carm.* i. xxxi. 17.

MY book would be incomplete indeed were it to pass over the name of the most remarkable writer, the most original, the most delightful, that France has ever produced. Yet what to say about Montaigne that has not been said before ? His life, his writings, his philosophy have been written of again and again. From time to time, every writer has a paper on Montaigne; once at least in every generation there is a translation, a biography, a reprint; once in his life at least every writer feels the desire to make him the subject of a study. For Montaigne is an established favourite; he belongs to the world: the older we grow the more we love to read him; the conditions of his life once ascertained just out of curiosity, we feel no more interest about the details. All these are of no consequence, because our thoughts are ever within that old round chamber where the texts on man's nothingness are

carved on the rafters, and where, surrounded by his thousand volumes, the philosopher sits and writes.

He is the descendant of a long line of country gentlemen, some of them merchants at Bordeaux. Scaliger said that Montaigne's father was a "herring-monger,"—which was ill-natured, as well as untrue,—whose family name was Yquem, Eyquem, or Ayquem. The head of the house resided in a castle, or fortified house, strong enough to resist any sudden attacks of wandering soldiers, and removed far enough from the track of armies to count on comparative security. In fact, during all the troubles of the Fronde, Montaigne never had any other guard than an old porter. The memory of Pierre Eyquem, Montaigne's father, has been preserved in the Essays, so that we know him almost as well as his son. A methodical orderly man, proud of his personal activity and of his appearance, restless and full of projects, he wanted to establish, among other things, the modern system of advertising; pure in life and manners, odd in his ways and dissatisfied if things were done as ordinary people do them; unlettered, but with a profound admiration for learning, altogether a quaint, admirable character, quite in harmony with that of his great son.

Michel de Montaigne was born in 1533, the third son. He was held over the font by two peasants, in order, his father said, that he might be under obligations to them, and look after their old age; it was a kindly thought. Then he was sent away to a nurse in a village hard by that he might be made strong and healthy. When he began to talk his father provided a German tutor who did not know French, with two assistant tutors; all these instructed to converse perpetually in Latin with the child, so that he might learn to speak

the Latin tongue before anything else. Not a word of French was allowed to reach his ears, and when he was brought home every person in the château, from his mother to the scullery maid, was strictly enjoined either to talk Latin to the child, or to hold their tongues. Soon they began to learn, even the servants, to talk Latin, and so far did the strong will of Pierre Eyquem prevail that many Latin words escaped from the kitchen and grew into use among the villages around, where perhaps they still linger, like the relics of the Greek among the Marseillais.

But at six years of age little Michel, his father distrusting his own experiment, was sent away to school, and probably very soon picked up the language of the boys. This was in 1539. The school was that college of Guienne where George Buchanan was a professor at the time, and where the great Muretus taught. Then he went through the miseries of school life. "What do you hear," he asks, "in school? Nothing but the screams of tortured children or of masters drunk with rage." He learned to like reading through Ovid, Virgil and Terence, acted in the Latin plays of Buchanan and Muretus, and was considered to have completed his school education at the age of thirteen. That is to say, he completed his preliminary training, and then was sent to study law, perhaps at Toulouse, perhaps at Bordeaux. At all events he was at Bordeaux during the curious insurrection of 1548.

We next find Montaigne in Paris, the city which he loved with more than the ordinary Frenchman's devotion. "I love Paris," he says, "for itself. I am a Frenchman only through this great city—great in its population, great in the happiness of its situation—but above all things, great in the variety of its conveniences and

appliances of all kinds; the glory of France, and one of the noblest ornaments of the world." In some capacity or other, now undiscoverable, Montaigne was attached to the Court, and found favour, not only with the king, Henry II., but also with his queen, Catherine of Medici. In 1554, being then twenty-one years of age, he was made a councillor of the Cour des Aides for Guienne. The post had been bought by his father for himself, and ceded by him to his son, who held it for twelve years. It was thus that he became the colleague of his most dear and especial friend, Étienne de la Boëtie.

The duties of the post did not, however, prevent him from spending most of his time at Paris, where, according to his own account, written in those ripe years when the glories of his youth appeared decked in all the colours that an unrepentant memory could lend, he led the life common to the young fellows of his own times —love-making his principal business, gambling his principal recreation. Remember that Montaigne, grave and decorous afterwards as became a married man and a country gentleman, never affected a morality he did not feel, and was a typical Frenchman in so far that he separated religion from life, holding that a creed gives safety and a death-bed absolution certainty.

In 1559 Henry II. was killed in that unlucky tournament by the lance of Montgomery, an accident of which Montaigne was an eye-witness. In the same year Montaigne accompanied the new king, Francis II. on his journey into Lorraine, on which he was accompanied by his wife, Mary Stuart. Nothing can exceed the admiration and love which Montaigne felt for this beautiful and unhappy queen—nothing more real than the indignation with which he speaks in later years of her execution. The year after, we find him

with Charles IX. in Rome, where he saw the celebrated three American Indians. And then he appears to have gone back to Bordeaux, to enjoy the society of La Boëtie, author of the "Servitude Volontaire." Their friendship was short, for the accomplished and learned La Boëtie died at the age of thirty-two, having known Montaigne only six years. His death-bed is described by the survivor with a simplicity and a devotion which make the scene entirely pathetic and beautiful. "My brother," said the dying man, "my brother whom I love so dearly, and whom I had chosen from so many men to renew with you that virtuous and sincere friendship, the use of which by the triumph of vice has for so long been removed from among us, so that only some traces remain in the memory of antiquity, I beg you, as a testimony of my affection, to be the heir of my library. This is a very small present, but it is heartily bestowed. It will be to you *μνημόσυνον tui sodalis.*" And the noblest essay that Montaigne ever wrote is that on "Friendship." Men at that period yearned after a communion of souls, which should be the highest and noblest friendship. Mostly, they were disappointed. Marot and Dolet believed in each other at first, but afterwards quarrelled. Ronsard and Joachim du Bellay, Rabelais and Jean du Bellay, Boileau and Molière, realized something of the perfect trust and confidence, none approached the ideal friendship, the love of David and Jonathan, so nearly as Montaigne and La Boëtie. But Jonathan died in 1563, and David, to assuage some of the anguish of his mind, looked about for a new mistress, a fact in his life which the historian notes in passing with some astonishment, as being a most singular and unphilosophical consolation. After the mistress came the wife. His marriage took place two

years later, when he was thirty-three years of age, the bride being the Demoiselle Françoise de Chassagne, daughter of a Bordeaux councillor. The marriage was one without much affection, and the philosopher, though he is careful to speak well of the married state,—"it is a gentle way of social life, full of constancy and confidence, with an infinite number of useful and solid offices and natural obligations,"—is always falling into little tempers about his wife and his domestic happiness. "Cato," he says, "like ourselves, was disgusted with his wife." "Marriage is like a cage, those birds that are inside desire to get out, and those that are out want to get in." There is nothing, however, to show that his wife was not a good woman, if a quick-tempered one, and a good wife. She brought him half-a-dozen children, all of whom died in infancy except one daughter.

Four years after his marriage Montaigne published his first book, which was a translation of a curious book by one Raymond de Sebonde, called "Theologia Naturalis," the first attempt to establish the Christian religion by arguments drawn from natural reasons, apart from revelation. No one seems to have taken much notice of the work, which was revived after the Essays had brought the author's name into notice.

In 1568 his father, Pierre Eyquem, died, and Michel, being now the eldest son—his brother, Captain St.-Martin, had been killed some time before by an accident in a tennis court—succeeded to the château and property of Montaigne. The year after this he resigned his post as counsellor, and then applied himself to the collection and publication of La Boëtie's Remains, a work which necessitated a good many visits to Paris. We are not told whether he took his wife with him, but one fears that he left the poor lady in the country while he went to

Paris to spend his mornings among the printers and his afternoons at court, basking in the favour of the queen-mother. There is no proof that he got into the literary circles which then formed the glory of Paris; and though he speaks in his Essays of having conversed with poets known to all the world, it is quite clear that he was not one of that band whose names still maintain their reputation. Among these were Antoine de Baïf, Ronsard, Du Bellay, Des Portes, and Agrippa d'Aubigné. We may be quite certain that if Montaigne had been one of them, we should have heard all about it, the little Gascon gentleman being by no means inclined to hide away the glory of his literary friendships. But in point of fact, the one single literary friend he had was La Boëtie, and no one in Paris suspected that for the hundreds who would read Ronsard and Baïf, there were going to be tens of thousands who would read Montaigne.

In 1571, the year before the Saint Bartholomew, Montaigne being then thirty-eight years of age, retired to his château with the design of spending the rest of his life in "the bosom of the learned Virgin, in repose and liberty." The repose was prevented from becoming monotonous by the uncertain tempers of his household. He acknowledges that he sometimes fell into rages himself, could not bear the troubles of domestic matters, and used to warn "those who had the right of being angry," *i. e.* his wife, "to be chary of their wrath, and not to let it loose without reason;" perhaps the most exasperating thing one could say to a quick-tempered wife.

It was at this period, then, that he began to write his Essays. Not that his life was altogether secluded from the world. He received the order of Saint-Michel, no great

distinction, but still something. He was sent by the Duke of Montpensier to make a great speech to the parliament of Bordeaux. He was in a perpetual terror during the civil war; afraid that his house would be attacked; suspicious that he had not, perhaps, joined the stronger party. He brought out his first volume of Essays in 1580. And then was attacked by the same dreadful disease which had killed his father; and it was in hopes of curing it that he travelled through France and Lorraine, Switzerland, Germany, and Italy. He enjoyed his travels enormously, writing the most interesting descriptions possible of what he saw, with reflections in his quaintest style, but returned without having done his disorder any good, to be Mayor of Bordeaux. This was a great and important honour. For the Mayor of Bordeaux must be a gentleman, an *armiger*, and he took precedence during his office of all nobles. Montaigne held the post for four years, being once re-elected. To his great satisfaction nothing of importance or difficulty happened during all that time. Then he returned to his château, where Henry of Navarre paid him a visit. Montaigne was on good terms with Corisande d'Adonis, "la belle Corisande," predecessor of Gabrielle d'Estrées, and at the same time was a friend of Queen Margaret of Valois, now separated from her husband.

Presently the plague broke out in Bordeaux and spread over the whole of Guienne and Périgord, the dreadful scourge raging with a virulence difficult to believe. Whole villages we are told were destroyed. Montaigne says that not a hundredth part of the people escaped—this must have been exaggeration. The grapes remained ungathered, the corn unreaped, and the people sat still waiting for death, none caring for anything but

to get sepulture; men while still in health dug their own graves, even got into them living, to escape the wild beasts. Montaigne himself saw one of his own workmen with the last movements left to him of hands and feet, *dragging the earth over himself*. In Bordeaux eighteen thousand died out of forty thousand. Montaigne left his château, and took what he calls his "caravan," consisting of his mother, his wife, his daughter, and his servants, to different places to get out of the way. He even refused to go into Bordeaux to preside at the election of his own successor. But Montaigne was not a hero, and it did not probably appear to him that duty called him to the post of danger.

In the midst of all these troubles he went on with the Essays. The third volume was completed and published in 1588, when he was fifty-five years of age. To bring this out he went to Paris, and there fell in with Mademoiselle de Gournay. Marie de Gournay, then twenty-two years of age, had long read and re-read the Essays till she had conceived a passion for the author. She heard that he was in Paris, and sent him a message full of compliments. Montaigne called upon her, came again, and then sat down to be worshipped. This was what he had wanted all along—some one to appreciate him. In the country no one seemed to know how great a man he was; he had, it is true, the honour of being ex-mayor of Bordeaux, but that was not enough—he wanted literary fame—he wanted disciples—he wanted flattery. He got it now in full measure, running over, from a young, beautiful, and accomplished woman. "I look," he says, "to no one else in the world"—had he not a daughter and a wife?—"If adolescence can foretell anything with certainty, that mind will be one day capable of the finest things. . . . The judgment

she formed about the first Essays, being a woman, and in this age, and so young, and the only one who did so in her neighbourhood . . . are accidents worthy of consideration." Of course! can any author have a doubt of the ability, the extraordinary sagacity, the keen intellect, of one who selects him, of all the rest, for praise and flattery? Marie de Gournay must be a genius. Poor Marie! we shall meet her again[1] when the roses are all faded, and the promise of her youth has come to nothing—passionate still in her worship of Montaigne, crowned still with the withered garland of praise which he placed upon her brow, rejoicing to the end in her title of Montaigne's adopted daughter.

While in Paris, the essayist found himself one day arrested and sent to the Bastille. No one accused him of having done anything, but a cousin of the Duke of Elbeuf having been arrested by the king at Rouen, the duke thought it would be well to exercise a reprisal. His imprisonment only lasted a few hours, Catherine of Medici herself sending an order for his immediate release. The little incident, however, was sufficiently discomposing to send him away at once, and he joined the court in its wanderings from Rouen to Blois. De Thou was with him at the time, and records some of their conversations: thus, this critic, incapable of understanding the Essays, actually advised Montaigne to cut out all the parts which related to himself and his personal likings and habits. The two were at Blois together when Henry murdered the Duke of Guise. In 1589, he went back to his own château, married his daughter, and sat down to talk with a new disciple, the Abbé Charron, and to write to Marie.

See p. 217.

And a few years later, before he reached his sixtieth year, came the much-feared death. Montaigne died on the 13th of September, 1591: his last action being to sit up in his bed with uplifted hands, in the act of adoration, when the priest elevated the host.

His mother survived him for nine years; his wife for thirty-six years. His only daughter, whose first act was to disperse her father's library, lost her husband and married again. One of his two daughters left three daughters, through the eldest of whom the Montaigne property remained in possession of the essayist's descendants till the present century.

Such, briefly told, is the life of Michel de Montaigne. It remains to say a word on the Essays. And here, in presence of the volumes that have been written upon him, it behoves us to be brief. In the first place, let us rid ourselves at once of the notion that Montaigne had any object in view. He had none. He conceived the idea of writing down his thoughts, his observations, his speculations, the results of his own experience. It was an experiment. The dignity of literature, just then occupied with ancient learning and newly discovered general ideas, had not yet stooped to the consideration of such a simple thing as ordinary humanity. Montaigne took the man of whom he knew most, himself, the creature which was to him the most interesting object in the world; and then began to group round this central figure all thoughts, influences, events, accidents and habits which had accumulated during his lifetime. The man stands before us for ever contemplating an immense pile of these things, his own. Suppose you had spread out before you all the things you had bought, possessed, or imagined, in the course of your

life; suppose there were the toys and games of childhood, the follies of youth, the disappointments, the projects, the successes of a long career, would not the mere description of these things make an interesting volume? But Montaigne does more. He gives us not only these things, but the things he has learned from them. Montaigne's Essays owe their greatest charm to the fact that they reveal not only the secrets of a soul, but of a soul not much raised above the commonplace, and like our own. Such influences as acted upon his spirit, act upon ours. He goes about the world among his fellows, plays the fool among the boys, and is sober when he grows older; has posts of honour and dignity; associates sometimes with great people; is himself a gentleman of some learning; is a married man, and a *père de famille.* There is nothing which is not entirely common-place, ordinary, and of mere routine in his life; everything which should make him entirely fitted for the task he undertook. The Pleiad poets, for instance, with their scholarship, seclusion, and pedantry—if these should attempt to do what Montaigne succeeded in doing, what sort of man would they produce? Consider what ordinary people talk about: listen to them at their tables, in the streets, in railway carriages: as they talk, Montaigne's people talked. It is not of politics, nor is it of literature, nor is it of art. They talk of their own habits first, their little dodges to keep off sickness and defer death; then, their likings and dislikings; then, any amusements that are going on; then, money-making; then, the topic of the day, on which they have a decided opinion. That is how Montaigne talked, that is how he wrote. Nothing clearer than the portraits of himself, got from his Essays: nothing less likely to excite enthusiasm.

He used to write in a large circular room, with an adjoining square cabinet. The rafters are bare, and covered with inscriptions, cut by the direction of Montaigne, such as the following:—

"Things do not torment a man so much, as the opinion he has of things."
"Every argument has its contrary."
"Wind swells bladders; opinion swells man."
"Mud and ashes, what have you to be proud of?"
"I do not understand, I pause, I examine."

The sides of the square cabinet were covered with fresco paintings, "Mars and Venus surprised by Vulcan," and such refreshing subjects, to which the philosopher might turn when wearied by working at his "certain verses of Virgil." The circular room, in which was his library of a thousand volumes, no contemptible collection for the time, is sixteen paces in diameter. Here for twenty years, save when he is running up to Paris "on business," sits a little squat-figured, undignified man; he is past forty now, and no longer fond of violent exercises: he dresses in plain white or black: he is quick and hasty-tempered, insomuch that his servants get out of his sight when he begins to call them "calves:" he is easily irritated by little things, such as the fall of a tile, or the breaking of a thing: he sits down to dinner late, because he does not like to see a crowd of dishes on the table: he is fond of wine, but is not intemperate; he is awkward, and unable to do things which other men do: cannot dance or sing: cannot mend a pen, saddle a horse, or carve meat, and his awkwardness makes him uncomfortable. He has all the virtues, he says, except two or three: never makes enemies, never does any man injury; makes it his rule to keep things comfortable about him; is

extremely kind-hearted, and eminently selfish. He is lacking in the domestic faculty; cares little about his wife, and does not pretend to care at all for babies; and he is always interfering with servants, so that they hate him. As regards his reading, it is without method, desultory; he takes up his books one after the other, and browses among them, reading Latin histories for chief pleasure. He evidently has no real love for poetry or power of criticism, because we find him turning from Ovid and Virgil and admiring the miserable centos in vogue at the time.

Do you want to know more about him? Read the Essays. There you will find every page with some allusion to himself. You will be pleased to learn that he prefers white wine to red; that he loves to rest with his legs raised; that he likes scratching his ear, with other interesting details.

It is all, in fact, as I said before, about himself. There is the man, with his appearance, his manners, his habits, and his baggage of thoughts. And because it is a real man, ten times as real as Rousseau's pretended self, therefore it is an immortal book. The main interests of life lie in the common-place; the great thoughts of a genius are too much for most of us; we like the easy wanderings of a mind of our own level;[1] we follow the speculations of one who is not far removed from ourselves with pleasure, if not with profit. Like him, we doubt; like him, we know nothing; like him, we

[1] People like best to read something just a little above their ordinary stratum of thought. Hence you get a sort of pyramid of popularity, at the base of which is Tupper. Next to him comes A. K. H. B. As you go higher up you pass Carlyle, Helps, Emerson, a crowd of dignified names. Very few people, if they reach the top, care to remain long in an atmosphere so cold and bracing.

have no disposition to be martyrs; like him, we long after something that we have not got, something that we cannot understand; like him, we feel it is an extremely disagreeable necessity, this of death.

Like ourselves, but yet superior. His mind differing in degree from ours, not in kind; larger, broader, keener. It is impossible that truth should be better studied in a successive series of observations, although he is never able to show the relations of one to another. They have, indeed, no natural relations to him. He feels himself in a labyrinth full of uncertainty, doubt, and perplexity, wanders aimlessly along, turning from path to path, plucking flowers as he goes, and careless about finding any clue. His mottoes, cut upon the rafters of his library, show his mind, in which uncertainty is the leading characteristic. An uncertainty which chimed in with the miserable condition of affairs in the world; when burnings, tortures, civil wars, horrid plagues, were the commonest accidents of life, and man's intellect, man's reason, man's kindly nature, seemed powerless to arrest the dreadful miseries wrought by king and priest. Religion? It is a need. Truth? Who knows what it is? Government? It means protection. Life? It means disappointment, disease, fear of death. Science? A bundle of contradictions. Love? It means falsehood and infidelity. And then men quarrel as to whether Montaigne was a Christian. It is exasperating to find the question so much as raised. What were these two banners under which men were ranged, of Huguenot and Catholic? Some poor artizans, like Bishop Briçonnet's weavers of Meaux, might greatly dare for liberty's sake; to the men of culture, the rival parties were but two political sides. Montaigne belonged to that side which represented, in his eyes, order and

law; he was, therefore, a Catholic. Like all the men of his own time, he had a creed, a kind of pill, to be taken when it might be wanted. The time had gone by when such men as Rabelais and Dolet hoped to bring the world to Deism; the scholars had accepted the inevitable position of orthodoxy, and while giving all their activity and interest to heathenism, were zealous supporters of the lifeless creed. Montaigne a Christian? compare his morality with that of the Gospels; read how the dread of death is breathed in every page of his book; remember how he says that to pretend to know, to understand aught beyond the phenomenal, is to make the handful greater than the hand can hold; the armful larger than the arms can embrace; the stride wider than the legs can stretch—"a man can but see with his eyes and hold with his grasp." Try then to remember that we are not in the nineteenth century, but in the sixteenth; that Montaigne died in the act of adoration, and cease to ask whether the man was a Christian. Christian? There was no better Christian than Montaigne in all his century.

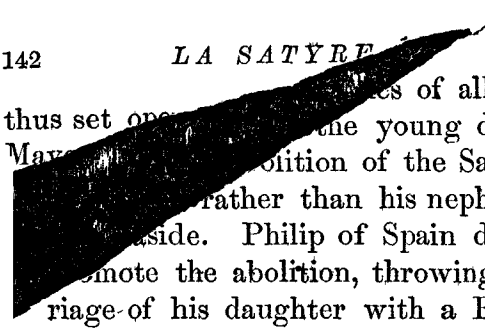
Chapter VII.

LA SATYRE MÉNIPPÉE.

FRENCH political satire, of which the *fabliaux* present few examples, found its first home among the Clercs de la Basoche; nor was it till well on in the sixteenth century that it escaped from the stage and appeared in verse and prose. Its first appearance in the new character was, as might almost have been expected, inconceivably libellous, personal, and coarse. There were the "Fanfreluche et Gaudichon," an apology, after the manner of Rabelais, for the Saint Bartholomew; the "Fortune de la Cour;" the "Ile des Hermaphrodites;" the "Légende du Cardinal de Lorraine;" the "Légende de Catherine de Médicis," and plenty of others. These, like wasps, inflicted their little sting, and passed away. One satire only had genius to make it live; one had vigour enough to turn the tide of popular opinion and influence the course of affairs. It was a satire, fresh, clean, healthy, and new, as well as strong; and was the work of a small band of unknown scholars, who devised it for their own amusement, without suspecting for a moment the effect it would produce. It came out in

the year 1593. Let us remem[redacted] of France at that time. King He[redacted]was the state noble and kingly act was the courage[redacted]only met his death, had been murdered by Fr[redacted] Clément in 1589, a few months after he had [redacted] murdered the Duke of Guise and the Cardinal. Pa[redacted] shouted and screamed with joy at the news. From every pulpit thundered praises of the regicide, and up and down the streets drove the Duchess of Montpensier, sister of the murdered Guise, with her mother, crying the good tidings about. Nor was it till the Parisians were quite hoarse with bawling, that they discovered their new position to be a great deal worse than the old. For the third Henry being dead, the next heir to the throne was undoubtedly the Huguenot Henry of Navarre. Before the murder of the king, some compromise was always possible between him and the League, but now, none. Worse than this, it was very soon discovered that the League was divided among themselves. For, if the Béarnais were kept out, who should come in? There were two possible answers to the question. By the abolition of the Salic law, the heiress of the crown was the Infanta Isabella of Spain, daughter of Philip II. by his third wife, Elizabeth, sister to the last three kings. Suppose the Salic law maintained, and Henry still kept out, the nearest heir to the crown was, undoubtedly, the young Duke of Guise himself.[1] The door was

[1] The able and ambitious man to whom was due the rise of this great house, Claude de Lorraine, was the second son of René, Duke of Lorraine. He married by the order of Francis I. Antoinette of Bourbon, in which way he became connected with the royal line. The greatness of the house continued to increase till, with the murder of Duke Henry by the king, it received a blow from which it never recovered. But it had made alliances with



thus set op[illegible]s of all kinds. The Duke of Ma[illegible]he young duke, was violently opposed. [illegible]olition of the Salic law in the interest of [illegible]rather than his nephew, whom he proposed to [illegible]side. Philip of Spain did all in his power to [illegible]mote the abolition, throwing out hints of the marriage of his daughter with a French noble, and even offering the crown, in this left-handed way, to the young duke. And so, when the great council of the States met in 1593, they found themselves unable to agree upon a policy, and separated, the cause of the League being irreparably injured by their indecision, their quarrels, and their personal interests.

Then, in the midst of the Catholic factions, in a time of general hesitation, doubt, and distrust, when the people were weary of war, when they began to understand that Spanish intrigues boded no good to France, there dropped among them all, like a bombshell—the "Satyre Ménippée."

The "Satyre Ménippée," named in imitation of Varro's Menippean Satires, which were in their turn named after that Menippus σπουδογελαῖος, who was imitated by Lucian, describes the meeting of the States of 1593.

It begins by introducing a couple of quacks, one of Lorraine and the other of Spain (the cardinals of Pellevé and Plaisance), retailing in the court of the Louvre the celebrated *Catholicon* of Spain, a drug which has the effect of enabling those who take it to commit any

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kings; it numbered four cardinals in as many generations; it had appropriated to itself all the dignities, honours, and offices possible to be got; and it had become powerful enough to shake the throne itself. Through Mary Queen of Scots, the daughter of Marie de Guise, their blood flows in the veins of our own royal family.

quantity of crimes and treasons without affecting the tranquillity of the conscience and entirely for the good of the church.

The way thus cleared, we have a description of the grand opening procession. First comes the rector of the university, late Bishop of Senlis, Roze by name. He has put off his rector's hat, and donned the gown of a master of arts, with a bishop's mantle, a soldier's gorget, a sword at his side, and a halberd in his hand. After him comes an army of curés, monks, novices, all equipped in similar style, armed according to Saint Paul's injunctions. Then follow the leaders of the League, each described with the fidelity of a caricature, the legate, "vray miroir de parfaite beauté," being the ugliest man in the world; Madame de Nemours, mother of the Duc de Mayenne, grandmother of the young Duc de Guise, uncertain whether to appear as queen-mother or queen-grandmother; the Dowager Duchess of Montpensier (sister to the Duc de Mayenne), with a green scarf, very dirty from long use; the guards, Italian, Spanish, and Walloon, but no French; and the rest. And so they all go to church, where they hear a sermon by Rector Roze on continuing the war, ending appropriately with the quotation, "Beati pauperes spiritu."

The hall in which the assembly is held is prepared so as to be exactly similar to that where Charles VII. the dauphin, in 1430, was declared incapable of succeeding to his father's kingdom, but the tapestry was all new, and apparently made with special reference to the business in hand. Thus, near the daïs Sertorius is represented, dressed as a Frenchman, among the Spaniards, about to consult the oracle, and on the other side is Spartacus, haranguing his army of slaves, with

a flambeau, which he is applying to a temple, and the motto:—

Si aquâ non possum, ruinâ exstinguam.

There were also delineated the fall of Icarus and that of Phaëthon, with the sisters of the latter metamorphosed into poplars, one of whom, who had broken her leg by running to help her brother, marvellously resembled the Duchess of Montpensier (she was lame).

On the tapestry near the daïs was the history of the golden calf, Moses and Aaron being represented by Henry III. and the Cardinal of Bourbon, and the calf having the lineaments of the late Duke of Guise.

The next piece represented the entry of John, Duke of Burgundy, into Paris, and the Parisians all singing "Noël."

Among the other pieces were the history of Absalom, who drove his father out of Jerusalem, all the faces being those of Leaguers; the feats and treacheries of the Bedouin and the Assassins, among them bearing a portrait of Henry III. being stabbed by a dissolute monk, out of whose mouth come the words "C'est l'enfer qui m'a créé;[1] the battles of Senlis, Aigues, and Ivry, with a dance of peasants in a corner singing a song:—

Reprenons la danse,
Allons, c'est assez:
Le printemps commence,
Les roys sont passez.
Un roy seul demeure;
Les sots sont chassez:
Fortune à ceste heure
Tous aux pots cassez.

[1] This is one of the happiest anagrams ever made. It is quite fairly formed from Frère Jacques Clément.

The assembly having entered, the places are allotted to them by a herald, without prejudice to any future claims of precedence. The speech in which he addresses each in turn with a personality, a satirical remark, or a sneer, is one of the best things in the book, but it cannot be quoted without a dozen pages of notes to explain the allusions. And at last we get to the speeches which were delivered.

Imagine, if you can, in the Houses of Parliament, for one night only, the customary forms and figures of speech abandoned, and each speaker in turn confessing all his failures and exposing his secret soul, the baseness of his motives, the littleness of his ambition, the narrowness of his vision, the poverty of his imagination, the extent of his ignorance, the selfishness of his measures. Or suppose, because our legislators are mostly respectable country gentlemen, who would only betray the narrowness of their information, and their intense desire to protect property, that some enemy, one who knew every detail of their private life and was certain to spare no weakness, to exaggerate folly into vice, and feebleness to imbecility—were to do this for them; and then, putting yourself back to a time of bitter enmities, when there are no rules of courtesy in pamphleteering, try to imagine what would be the result, and you will have the "Satyre Ménippée."

The proceedings are opened by the Duke of Mayenne. I propose to give a few extracts from the speeches as they follow, so as to show not only the manner of the satire, but the good sense that underlies the whole. The duke begins:—

You are all witnesses here, how, ever since I took up arms for the League, I have ever preferred my own private interest to the cause of God, who can indeed very well protect Himself without me,

and I can say with perfect truth, that I was not so much outraged by the murder of my brothers as I was stimulated to follow in their footsteps. . . . You know how in my expedition to Guyenne, I failed utterly, and only succeeded in carrying away a girl, the heiress of Caumont, whom I destined for my own son. . . . Then you know how I undertook no important siege, or any great exploit, in order to reserve myself entirely for my Catholic designs. . . . And you all saw how quickly I hastened to you, and how the divine inspiration descended on the Sorbonne, by the help of my cousin the Constable of Bourbon. Hence have proceeded all our splendid exploits of war: hence the thousands of holy martyrs, dead by the sword, by hunger, fire, rage, despair, and other violences, for the cause of the sacred union. . . . Hence the ruin and demolition of so many churches and monasteries. . . . Hence all the sack and pillage which our brave soldiers, free archers, and novices had carried on in town and village. . . . Hence so many maidens violated, and so many young monks and priests debauched. In short, the prompt and jealous decree of the Sorbonne, passed after drinking, is the sole cause of all this direct interposition of Heaven, and so, by our own diligence, we have turned this kingdom of France, which was once a delightful garden full of all kinds of abundance, into a vast universal cemetery, full of lovely painted crosses, biers, gallows, and gibbets. . . .

Read the books of Josephus on the wars of the Jews—they were very much like our own—and tell me whether the zealots Simon and John ever had more inventions and subtleties to persuade the people of Jerusalem to die of hunger, than I myself have invented to kill a hundred thousand with the same death in this my city of Paris, even to making the mothers devour their own children, as was done in the sacred city. . . . A hundred times have I violated my own oath, sworn to my private friends and relatives, in order to arrive at what I want myself, and my cousin the Duke of Lorraine, as well as the Duke of Savoy, could acknowledge the truth of this. . . . As to public faith, I have always considered that my exalted rank put me above it, and the prisoners whom I have made pay ransom against my promise, or the composition they made with me, can reproach me with nothing, because I have always had absolution from my chaplain and confessor. . . . We see the people crying after peace, a thing which we ought to fear more than death, and I would a hundred times rather become a Turk or a nun, always by the grace and permission of our most holy father the Pope, than see those heretics sit down and enjoy their own, which you possess. . . . Let us die, let us die rather than come to that: a glorious sepulture is the ruin of a kingdom like ours, under which we must be buried unless we can somehow climb out of it. Never did man, high placed as I myself in France, come down except by force; there are many

ways of getting into power like mine: there is but one way out of it —death.

After the Lieutenant comes the Legate. He begins in Italian, goes on to dog-Latin, and finishes in Italian. His speech is very short:—

And now I will go on to tell you the sum and total of my legation, which is taken from St. Matthew, chap. x.: "Think not that I am come to bring peace into the world, I am not come to send peace, but the sword." For I have nothing in my orders and secret instructions except to exhort you to battle and war, and in every way to hinder you from treating of reconciliation and peace between yourselves. . . . The other point which I have to bring before you is the election of a good Catholic prince, the family of the Bourbons being entirely set aside as heretical altogether, as a favourer of heretics; and I know that you would do a most grateful thing to our lord the Pope, as well as to my benefactor the most Christian and Catholic King of Spain and to many other countries, if you were to confer the duchy of Brittany upon his daughter and the kingdom of France upon some other prince of his family, whom she might choose for her husband. . . .

"I forgot to tell you of an excellent piece of news I have just received. His Holiness excommunicates all cardinals, archbishops, and bishops, abbés, priests and monks, who declare for the king, whether they be Catholics or not. And so that there may be no difference between French and Spanish, the Holy Father will arrange for the French to have the scrofula the same as the Spaniards, and to become swaggerers and liars like them. Further, plenary indulgence to all good Catholics, Lorrainers or Spaniards or French, who will kill their fathers, brothers, cousins, neighbours, princes of the blood, and political heretics in this truly Christian work, up to the three hundred thousand years of pardon. . . . And, for my sake, do make a king. I care not if you elect the Devil himself, provided he become the servant and feudatory of the Pope, and of the Catholic king by whose means I have been made a cardinal. . . . But above all, take particular care not to say a word about a truce or a peace, or the sacred college will renounce Christ. Ego me vobis iterum commendo. Valete.

The Legate is followed by the Cardinal de Pellevé, also in the interests of Spain. His speech is more elaborate than his predecessor's, but in the same key. Speaking of the King of Spain and his pretensions, he says:—

Do not imagine that this excellent king sends you so many ambassadors, and makes the Pope send you these legates of his, with any other intention than to make you believe how catholicly he loves you; and you may possibly think that he who is lord of so many kingdoms, that he cannot, as Charlemagne did for his monasteries, count them with the letters of the alphabet, and is so rich that he does not know what to do with his treasures, would be likely to trouble himself about *so small a matter as the kingdom of France.* Why, all Europe is not equal to one of those countries of his conquered from the savages. . . . His treatment of the Netherlands and the new world ought to be enough to assure you that he no more thinks of doing any mischief than an old monkey, and even if he were to cause you all to perish by fire, shell, and famine, would you not be happy indeed, in finding yourselves seated in Paradise, above the confessors and patriarchs, and laughing at the Huguenots whom you would see beneath you roasting and boiling in the caldrons of Lucifer? Die, gentlemen, whenever you please. We have plenty of Africans, Moors, Walloons, and Italian brigands to take your place. Kill, massacre and burn everything; the Legate will pardon everything; the Lieutenant will confess everything; the Duke of Aumale will arrange everything; Monsieur de Lyon will seal everything; and Monsieur Mastran will sign everything. As father confessor I shall serve you and France too, provided she has the sense to die a Catholic, and make the Spaniards and Lorrainers her heirs in general and particular, assuring you, after the Legate, that your souls will not have to pass through the fires of purgatory, being already sufficiently purged by the fires which we have lighted in the four corners of the kingdom for the Holy Virgin, and by the fasts, abstinences, and penances which we are going to make you undergo.

I pass over the speech of Monsieur de Lyon, Archbishop d'Espinac, which is more savage than any which precedes, because it offers little or nothing new. D'Espinac had at least conviction, as he proved by dying of grief when Henry IV. made himself master of Paris.

We come to the oration, by Nicolas Rapin, of the Rector Roze. This is, in my own opinion, the most perfect oration of all, except the serious one by Pierre Pithou. Pedantry, self-conceit, bigotry, cruelty, all the vices that ecclesiastical partizanship produces are paraded here. He speaks of the desolation of the university

caused by the war. All, he says, is changed. There are no more disputations in Latin, no more acting of the classical drama, no more printing, bookselling, lecturing, or teaching.

Thanks to the Holy League, and to you, M. le Lieutenant, the butter-sellers of Vanves, the ruffians of Montrouge, the vine-dressers of St. Cloud, the cobblers of Villejuive, and other Catholic districts, are become masters of arts, bachelors, principals, presidents, and scholars of colleges, regents of classes, and philosophers so acute that now they dispute *de inventione*, and learn every day αὐτοδιδάκτως, with no other teacher than you, M. le Lieutenant, to decline and die with hunger *per regulas*. . . . You are the cause of all this, M. le Lieutenant: not that we have done nothing by our decrees and preachments. But it is you, I say, who have really defiled and defamed this eldest daughter and disowned of France, this modest virgin, this comely damsel, this pearl of pearls, this lily of Paris, so that all other universities make scoff and laugh at her, *et versa est in opprobrium gentium.*

He goes on to talk about the kingdom, and recommends plans by which the secret ambition of all the leaders may be satisfied. Nothing more cynical was every written.

And, M. de Guise, believe me—and you will believe a fool—do better than this: obtain from the Holy Fathers a new crusade and go regain your fair realm of Jerusalem, which belongs to you by right of your grand-uncle Godfrey, as well as Sicily and Naples. How many palms and trophies wait for you! How many sceptres and crowns are preparing for you! Leave this miserable kingdom of France to whoever will take charge of it: it is not worth your consideration, born as you are for universal empire. . . ? And you, M. le Lieutenant, what do you propose doing? You are fat and stuffed out; you are heavy and sickly, your head is big enough to carry a crown, but you say you don't want it . . . and if we were to elect you king, you would have still to do with the Béarnais, who knows a thousand tricks, and who never sleeps except when he likes and just as long as he likes: he will become a Catholic, as he threatens, and draw over to his side all the powers of Italy and Germany. . . Think of it . . . It is all very well to make yourself out a king, but if you blow yourself up as big as you please, like the frog, you will never be so great a lord as he. But I will tell you what you may do, you may become an abbé: there is not a king going but

would make you prior of Cluny, which belongs to your own house. . . . And as to electing a king, I give my voice to Guillot Fagotin, churchwarden of Gentilly, a good vine-dresser, a worthy man, who sings well and knows the service by heart. . . . I have read in that great and divine philosopher, Plato, that those kingdoms are happy where the philosophers are kings, and the kings philosophers. Now I know that for three years this excellent churchwarden, with his family and his cows, has been meditating philosophy day and night in the hall of our college,[1] where for more than two hundred years we have disputed philosophy and Aristotle and all sorts of moral books; and it is impossible that the worthy man should have slept, dreamed and slumbered so many days and nights between these philosophical walls, where so many learned lessons have been given, and so many splendid discourses delivered, without something penetrating into his brain, just as happened to the poet Hesiod when he slept upon Mount Parnassus. Wherefore I stick to my opinion and give my voice that Guillot Fagotin, the churchwarden of Gentilly, be elected king as well as any other.

He is followed by the Sieur de Rieux, put forward to represent the nobility. This was one of the shrewdest ideas of the book, the speaker being little better than a mere brigand, not of noble blood at all, and owing his advancement to nothing but his own courage. He was guilty of every crime, he was taken prisoner the year after this assembly of the States, and hanged, in spite of his rank, as a common robber. In his speech he congratulates himself upon being chosen to speak for the nobility, having been promoted by special and Divine favour from the post of simple assistant commissary to the rank of gentleman and the office of governor of a fortress. As for the people, he knows how to treat them:—

I know plenty of devices to bring them to reason: I tie whipcord round their foreheads: I hang them by the arms: I warm

[1] During the siege the peasants drove in their flocks and stabled them wherever they could, in the empty halls of colleges, among other places.

their feet with a red-hot shovel: I put them in irons: I shut them up in the oven: I enclose them in a box half full of water: I truss them up like roast fowls: I flog them with stirrup leathers: I salt them: I starve them: I have a thousand pleasant methods to draw out the quintessence of their purses and to have their substance, so as to make them and all theirs for ever mere vagabonds and rogues. . . .

As for making a king, make me, and you will do well. I will abolish all this rubbish of justice: I will suppress all these serjeants, procureurs, commissaries, and councillors, except only my own friends: you will hear no more talk about seizures, execution, bailiffs and paying debts: you shall all be as comfortable as rats in straw. Think it over, and be very well assured that I shall be as good a king as any other.

And then follows the speech of M. D'Aubray. Here the burlesque suddenly ends, and the discourse is sober, serious, and sad, M. D'Aubray pointing out what is in reality the state of Paris and of the country; he shows that for the restoration of order only one thing is possible, the restoration of the lawful king: he points to the starving people, the haggard children clinging to their haggard mothers, the very soldiers hardly strong enough to crawl, and the wretched food which is reckoned a luxury; he takes a short view of the events which have led to this misery, an *abrégé* which is remarkable above all for its judicial lucidity: and he reproaches his auditors with their unnatural dealings with a national enemy. It is a long, laboured, and perfectly serious appeal to the nation to return to good sense: there is nothing in it which need be quoted now, because it is all so serious, and is chiefly valuable as a contribution to history. The man who wrote it is truly admirable, if only for the dispassionate way in which he marshals his evidence and puts his points. He feels strongly, but he lets his passion be felt, and not expressed—and this, perhaps, is the truest form of eloquence. When invective fails, and sarcasm has

fallen unnoticed, the bare and honest truth, set forth in plain words, is the next weapon. Such is the Satire. Who were the writers of it?

The idea is due to Pierre Le Roy, canon of Rouen, and secretary to the Cardinal de Bourbon. He it was who sketched out the whole and wrote the opening scenes. The thing was talked over in the house of one Gillot, clerk to the parliament, where afterwards Boileau was born. Gillot, a canon of the Sainte-Chapelle, held regular *réunions* at his house where a little knot of scholars and poets assembled, the good canon delighting himself with taking down notes of the conversation and good things. He wrote, also, works which still stand on some shelves, and are said by those who have looked into them, to contain a vast quantity of learning.

One of the most active *collaborateurs* was Nicolas Rapin, who served the cause of Henry with the sword at Ivry, as well as, later, with his pen. He it was who wrote the speech of the Rector Roze. Second-rate scholar, third-rate poet, father of an immense family, Rapin had a busy and stormy life. He wrote an immense quantity of verse both in Latin and French; in the latter, he took part in the celebrated "Flea" collection—translations from Horace, odes, epigrams, epistles, all that an accomplished poet can do. Truly this sixteenth century loaded the earth with more than its fair share of literature, and sad it must be for the shade of Rapin the voluminous, that he is only remembered now by his single contribution to the "Satyre Ménippée." He, too, so anxious about his glory, and going out of the world in the most beautiful and swanlike manner, dictating Latin verses to his son.

A much greater genius, and also a busy and active

bookworm, is Jean Passerat, who wrote most of these verses for the "Satyre." After spending his youth in running away from school and doing all those things which are abhorrent to the model boy, he suddenly took it into his head to become a scholar, and laboured till the day of his death, the usual sixteen hours a day which were then thought necessary to produce a Latinist. Like Rapin, he produced an enormous quantity of Latin verse—it makes the brain stagger to think of the miles of hexameters these men wrote and printed, poor children of thought consigned to oblivion as soon as born—and he also managed to find time for some exceedingly pleasant light verse in his native tongue. He even contrived in spite of the influences of his friends, the poets of the Pleiad, to keep a style of his own. A great part of his poetry is erotic, though we are given to understand that he was never in love, being, like Alain Chartier and Eustache Deschamps, as he writes of himself, too ugly for love. He was short of stature, one eye gone altogether and the other giving little light, with a red face and an enormous great nose. Men with great noses have before this been certainly married and therefore, presumably, loved: at least one supposes so—but perhaps Passerat's sensitiveness as to his personal defects was based upon ignorance of the female sex.

He was a great admirer of Rabelais, which does him infinite credit, and he even wrote a voluminous commentary upon him which remained unpublished. Like the Master, Passerat was fond of wine, which perhaps explains the magnitude and redness of his nose.

His strains are chiefly on the one theme of which my Frenchmen are never tired. From beginning to end it is the same refrain:—

Gather ye roses while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying.

Occasionally they go off to other *motifs*, but they return. Is there anything so sad, to those who love life, and sunshine, and the light laughter of girls, as to feel the years slipping by, the end approaching? The Frenchman will dare everything, expect everything, laugh at everything, except only the slow slipping away of the golden hours. For he loves them every one.

Let Jean Passerat chant his little ditty before we go on:—

Wake from sleep, to greet the morn,
And come away;
See, for us once more is born
The light of day.
Vanish'd is the May's short night,
And the summer sky is bright
With cloudless blue;
'Tis the very time for love;
Mignonne, does the season move
Thy heart too?

Rise, and through the wood and glade
Come with me;
Long the birds their songs have made
From every tree:
Listen, one outbids them all—
'Tis the sweet-voiced nightingale
That we hear;
Mirthfully he ever sings;
Like him leave all troublous things,
Age draws near.

Time, who hates our merry ways,
His pinions shakes,
As he flies, our happy days
With him he takes.
Sadly, sadly wilt thou say,
Worn with age, some future day,
"Vain was I
To let the beauty of my face
Neglected fade, and all the grace
Of youth pass by."

Scaliger, who hated everybody with any pretensions to scholarship, as much as German Orientalists hate each other at the present day, said that Passerat had only read eight books in his life, and was by no means the great man he thought himself, which is quite possible. Very few people are.

The next contributor to the "Satyre" is Florent Chrestien, who had once been tutor to Henry IV. The honest king remembered his old tutor with a growl of resentment whenever his name was mentioned, which leads one to suspect that the revenues of the Navarre Educational Department would not bear the expense of a whipping boy. However he gave Chrestien a pension, which was well merited by the harangue of the Cardinal Pellevé, his work.

But the really serious part of the "Satyre" was contributed by the greatest man of them all. Pierre Pithou wrote the harangue of D'Aubray. This remarkable man was a Huguenot by birth and narrowly escaped murder on the Bartholomew day. Returning to Paris when the storm was over, he abjured and was reconciled to the church, a step taken by a great many Huguenots. We must remember that the step meant little more than a change of politics.

To men who had no strength of religious conviction, one church was just as good as another, and the strongest was of course the safest. Pithou's life was chiefly spent in the elucidation of the canonical law, and he was one of the earliest writers who maintained the liberties of the Gallican church. Besides his law books he found time to edit in his leisure moments, the works of Phædrus and Petronius, the "Declamations" of Quintilian, the "Pervigilium Veneris," the "Bordeaux Pilgrim," and so forth, slight dallyings with lighter literature, just

as Lord Selborne, when he is not making laws, copies out a psalm, or as Mr. Gladstone, in his leisure moments, considers a myth. A man of strong solid sense; one of those who live in the present; a scholar, but no bookworm; a conservative lawyer, but no pedant; a clear-sighted man, of no enthusiasm; a partisan of order; and one who, above all, saw that men's whims and notions must be humoured and treated solemnly. With this view he relieved the consciences of the French bishops by providing them with fifty reasons for giving absolution to Henry IV.

At the end of the "Satyre Ménippée," is a little bit of fooling called the "Trespas de l'Asne" by Gilles Durant, Sieur de la Bergerie, a superior poet to any of the preceding. He wrote *vers de société*, little love ditties, laments for the flight of time. And he sums up his philosophy in the following lines:—

If all we did were guarded still
(Some writers teach us so)
By thought of what, for good or ill,
The future years shall show:

'Twere too much care and thought to spend,
Too great a load to bear:
We live from day to day, my friend,
And not from year to year.

Our life with doubtful fate is won,
With doubtful issues flies:
We know not if to-morrow's sun
Will greet our living eyes.

What boots it then to ask of fate
What loss it gives, what gain?
The evil to anticipate,
And feel too soon the pain?

Long live to-day—our own at least:
Shall we to-morrow see?
Take what you can of joy and feast,
And let to-morrow be.

Chapter VIII.

MATHURIN REGNIER.

What's fame? A fancied life in others' breath;
A thing beyond us, even before our death.

Pope.

SATIRE, as we have seen, in irregular form, then, had always been plenty in France. Poems directly and professedly satirical; the "Tournoyement de l'Antichrist" of Huon de Méry; the Bible Guyot; the Sirventes; the "Loups ravissants" of Robert Gobin; the celebrated "Reynard the Fox;" and the great mass of Goliardic verses; all these were confessedly satirical in their aim. Besides which, the mediæval collection of France simply abounds and overflows with satire. *L'esprit gaulois* is beyond everything satirical, mocking, irreverent. But it was not till late in the sixteenth century that satire, strictly so called, and in imitation of the classics, was revived. It was preceded by the epigram, a sort of morning star before the sun, of which the great master was unquestionably Mellin de Saint Gelais, whose genius passed into a kind of proverb. Ronsard writes, for instance:—

Écarte bien de mon chef
Tout malheur et tout méchef;
Préserve moy d'infamie,
De toute langue ennemie,
Et de tout esprit malin:
Et fais que devant mon prince
Désormais plus ne me pince
La tenaille de Mellin.

At the same time first appeared the celebrated *Coq-à-l'âne* epistles of Marot, which, like all good things, were repeated till the very name became nauseous. Joachim du Bellay, "standard-bearer" in the school of Ronsard, was the first to raise his voice against the *Coq-à-l'âne* school of verse. It was indeed Joachim du Bellay who first wrote a satire according to the rules—that is, in imitation of Horace. Its *motif* is the road to success for a court poet. It possesses humour, subtlety, and that charm of language which peculiarly distinguishes the last and best of the great Du Bellay family. Here is a piece of it:—

Thou, reader, who wouldst learn the pathway short,
By which to rank among the wits of court,
No longer rack thy brain, no longer dream
Of Muses, and that ever sacred stream
Made by the heel of Pegasus: but heed
The way I teach thee—so shalt thou succeed.
And first, act not as some, with feeble aim,
Doom'd still to fail, striving for Pindar's fame;
Fly not like Horace thou, but take a course
Where thy more simple nature lends thee force;
Care not for controversy; whether Art
Or Nature more her help to verse impart
Inquire not thou: enough for thee to know
That at the court they care not. Onward go,
Guided by instinct, art and learning scant—
To bow and cringe the only art to want—
Some little tinkling sonnet—hand it round.
Some chanson with no merit but the sound,
Some rondeau with a ballad spliced has proved
Divine to those whom Iliads had not moved.

Leave all the antiquated Latin rules,
What use are they in our French modern schools?
The court thy Virgil and thy Homer make—
The court whence all their inspiration take.
* * * *
Another point mark well: success is thine,
If thou hast learn'd the noblest art—to dine.
Here a nice conduct, here a wise parade
Of wit and learning, will thy fortune aid:
Be ready with the repartee and jest,
Preserve a commonplace for every guest.
Pass over what you know not; what you know
Even from an hour's reading, keep for show.

It is the first regular satire in the language, and is, perhaps, a little too fine. Remember that Du Bellay was above all tied and bound by the rules of those "Latins et Grégeois," away from whom he thought there was no safety, so that his advice to his own school would have read like the highest kind of irony. His satire appeared about the year 1550. In 1572 was published another, written by Du Verdier, called "Les Omonimes, satire des mœurs corrompues de ce siècle." It is, so far as I have learned—for I am only acquainted with it at second-hand—simply unreadable, being written in *rimes équivoques*.[1]

The following year saw the "Courtisan Retiré" of Jean

[1] It will save the trouble of explaining what this poetical *tour de force* means, to give a few lines.

Contre luxurieux plus qu'un Faune ou Satyre;
Je vouloy débacquer par cuisante satire;
J'avoy fait mon project reciter en dix vers
Les abus, les malheurs, les affaires divers
Qui en ces troubles sont renversez dessous France
Dont le peuple est réduit en extrême souffrance.
Et n'y a des états nuls qui n'aillent disans
Que c'est par trop souffert d'avoir souffert dix ans.

Could not something penal be done with writers such as these? A year's solitary imprisonment, for instance, with Du Verdier as sole companion, would be disagreeable enough to deter from any crime.

de la Taille. In 1586 Gabriel Bounyn wrote a "Satire au roy contre les républicains." In 1593 appeared, as we have seen, that perfectly original work, the "Satyre Ménippée." About the same time Vauquelin, whose works were only published in 1612, wrote an "Art Poétique" and half-a-dozen satires, calling on poets to imitate Horace.

And then came the king of French satirists, MATHURIN REGNIER. He was not, of course, alone, but, like Shakespeare, Molière, and all great leaders, he is of no school. Only *facile princeps*, like them. Thus, his friends and contemporaries wrote satires, all of which have perished. Forquevaux wrote sixteen. Ganiste wrote one called "Les Atomes." D'Aubigné, ancestor of Madame de Maintenon, wrote half-a-dozen on the evils of civil war, which appear to have been rather a faithful description than satires. Among them is a portrait of that immeasurably worthless scamp, Henry III. The poet is describing the sons of Catherine:—

> The third was better skill'd in woman's gauds,
> And all their changes, skill'd, too, in the frauds
> And subtleties of love; with shaven chin,
> With pale face, with a woman's gait and mien
> So closely matched, that at a courtly feast
> The shameless creature like a woman dress'd:
> His long hair looped with pearl-embroider'd bows;
> A new Italian bonnet with long rows
> Of gems and double peaks, and hanging lace;
> Bedaub'd with rouge and plaster was his face;
> Powder'd his head, each woman's art bestow'd,
> Till like some shameless painted quean he show'd.

Mathurin Regnier, the eldest son of a respectable bourgeois of Chartres, and nephew of the poet Desportes, was born in the year 1573. His father, with an eye to the uncle, the possessor of many rich benefices, "tonsured" him, after the curious custom of the time,

at eleven years of age. The boy quickly comprehended the situation. His uncle was rich and a poet. Why could not he, too, be a poet, and consequently rich? Many young men have made this disposition of themselves for the future, but few have been able to carry it into effect; for to be a poet, and to grow rich by the proceeds of one's poetry, are withheld from most. Fortunately, however, for poets, this was a time when they were in clover, for the demand actually exceeded the supply, and for a hundred and fifty years to come, if a man could write tolerable verse, he was certain of a pension, and could probably reckon on a few fat livings. The same sort of thing is remarkable now-a-days, though to a less degree, as regards novelists. Regnier, therefore, began to write verses, and at twenty years of age got the protection of the Cardinal de Joyeuse, with whom he went to Rome, staying there for eight years, not much to his own happiness, for he speaks of this time with the bitterness of a disappointed man:—

I left my home, and happy in my dreams,
Full of the strength of youth and lofty aims,
A courtier in a prelate's train I fared,
And countless dangers in his service dared.
My mind, my very self I had to change,
Drink warm, eat cold, and sleep on pallets strange.
All day, all night, to follow in his train
I gave my liberty; for all my pain,
The right to be his slave at church, at board;
Happy, if sometimes I might please my lord.

He finds out at last, he says, that fidelity is no great revenue, and returns disappointed to France. But he returns to Rome again in the service of the Duke de Bethune. Two years after he comes home again, thirty years of age, poor as ever, disappointed and discontented.

This time he took refuge with his uncle, the poet Desportes, at the time the foremost man of letters, so far as influence went, in France. Tallemant des Réaux tells one or two stories of this part of his life. Desportes was a man to whom young poets brought their pieces for his reading and judgment. On one occasion he gave a poem written by a young advocate to his nephew to read for him. The work contained in one place the line—

Je bride icy mon Apollon.

Regnier read no further, but wrote in the margin—

Faut avoir le cerveau bien vide
Pour brider des Muses le roy ;
Les dieux ne portent point de bride,
Mais bien les asnes comme toy.

When Desportes, who had not even looked at it, gave the manuscript back to the author, he complimented him on the admirable things it contained. Of course, the poet discovered the annotation of the scholiast, and returned in a furious rage, complaining of the way in which he had been treated, so that Desportes was obliged to confess the whole business.

On another occasion occurred the celebrated quarrel of Malherbe with Regnier and his uncle. Regnier had invited Malherbe to dinner. He came late, and found that they had not waited for him, which annoyed him. However, Desportes treated him with great civility, and informed him that he proposed presenting him with a copy of his "Psalms," just then completed. He even rose from his seat and offered to go up-stairs at once and get the book. Malherbe, the most disagreeable of men, rudely replied that it was not worth the trouble; that he had already seen the "Psalms," and that, on the whole, he preferred the poet's soup. The rest of

the dinner was, as might fairly be expected, conducted in a frigid silence, and Malherbe never afterwards spoke to Desportes or Regnier. It is very curious to note how, in that age of ceremonious politeness, the rudest things were sometimes said and done, things a great deal worse than ever happen now, even though one knows that there will be no challenging, no kicking, and no boxing of ears. Regnier never forgave Malherbe. It is of him and of his school that he writes in his ninth satire—

> As for their learning, why it just extends
> To scratch a word which here and there offends:
> To see their pedant prosody obeyed;
> That following rhymes be short or long instead;
> Watch that one vowel meet no vowel next
> So that the delicate ear catch up the text.
> But leaving all the Muses' aid beside,
> No noble spur pricks up their poet-pride;
> Feebly they creep, and with inventions stale
> Eke out the dull, correct, and feeble tale.

If it had been Boileau, he would have ended by a sort of direct explanation of the whole passage—

> Like Malherbe slumber, and like Malherbe crawl—

or some such line, to point the verse and make the whole quite clear to the meanest capacity. But we are not yet arrived at the age of personalities. Regnier attacks a school whose master he hates; but he does not permit himself the pleasure of personal invective.

Later on, his animosity to the disciples of Malherbe took a form sufficiently real and pronounced, for he challenged Maynard, the writer of so many epigrams, odes, and chansons, to a duel. Maynard, not remarkable for courage, but not daring to refuse, informed the Count de Clermont-Leduc of the approaching combat, and begged him to appear in time and separate them. When the time came, the Count was there, true to his

word; but he hid himself behind a tree. Poor Maynard made a thousand excuses to prolong the time—quarrelled about the length of the swords, took half an hour to pull off his boots, found his shoes too tight; at last, when the fight could no longer be postponed, he mournfully took the sword in his hand, and—the Count appeared. But it was too late for Maynard, who gave up pretending any longer, and apologized abjectly to Regnier, reserving his wrath for the Count, whom he overwhelmed with reproaches. It was not the only duel fought by Regnier, who was as handy with his sword as with his pen; that fought with Berthelot, for instance, is commemorated in a poem printed with his works.

Regnier died at the age of thirty-nine, in the very flower and prime of his powers. The only facts of his life are those which I have told, besides one or two not so edifying as we might wish.

Of French satirists after the manner of the ancients, there are but two worthy of consideration—Regnier and Boileau. Of the two, the former seems to me incomparably the superior. Why, I will set forth afterwards. Let me first try to give a clear idea of the worth of this little read and almost forgotten poet.

The little volume of his collected works contains seventeen satires, two or three elegies, with a few odes, ballads, songs, epigrams, dialogues, and short pieces, which we may leave aside altogether. They offer nothing that calls for any serious remark, being neither better nor worse than the common-place poetry in vogue at the time. It is in the satires that we look to find Regnier himself.

To begin with, they are cast, like all satires, in the mould of Horace and Juvenal. They describe the

same types, the miser, the man with a hobby, the bore, and all the rest of them. There are the appeals of a sham indignation, the outcries of a simulated fury, the contempt of a pretended scorn, that we know so well and detest so bitterly. Surely of all shams, the worst is a sham indignation. How poor, how used up and common-place it appears to be when we read:—

O débile raison! où est ores ta bride?
Où ce flambeau qui sert aux personnes de guide?
Contre les passions trop foible est ton secours,
Et souvent, courtisane, après elles tu cours,
Et, savourant l'appas qui ton ame ensorcelle,
Tu ne vis qu'à son goust et ne vois que par elle.

And have we not read, how many times have we not read, the lament of a past age?

Fathers of bygone years, your lives a page
Worthy of envy by this mocking age
(Did there yet linger aught of good and true),
Look down and say what things we seem to you.
In your time virtue, simple, pure, austere,
Followed its nature guileless and severe.

* * * *

Her lamp threw round your path a splendour clear,
Which left no room for doubt, no place for fear;
And without thought of gain in other sense,
She was herself your prize and recompense.
We follow other gods, our virtue now,
Perfumed and plastered, taught to dance and bow,
Spends at the ball long nights, and seeks to move
By arts effeminate a woman's love;
Rides at the chace a noble horse to death,
Or at the quintain tilts till out of breath,
New feats gymnastic studies and invents,
Equal at arts of toilette and of fence,
Contrives new ballets, sings the latest air,
And writes the prettiest verses for the fair,
Affects all learning, prates of critic's rules,
And rates at equal value wise and fools.

It seems to me as if this sort of generalized satire is the easiest thing in the world to do, and the most use-

less when done. To be sure we have become accustomed to it, and Regnier began the thing, so that it had in his time the novelty of freshness.

He aimed, you see, at imitation. He wanted to apply the Horatian method to modern times. Instead of Lucilius, Horace, Persius, and Juvenal, we are to have Desportes and Regnier: the Louvre and the Pont-Neuf stand for the Forum: and the names and dresses being changed, all is to be as before. There is the pedant, as we have said, the bad poet, the bore, the banquet, the declamations against the vices of the world, the confession of his own habits and opinions. We have them all. You may find them, as well, in Boileau, Pope, and everybody else, though Regnier has the great credit of being the first. Bearing in mind, therefore, that his mind was imbued with Juvenal and Horace, that he imitates openly, that his chief and only pride is to present the Latin satirist as a Frenchman of his own age, it is absurd to hunt about for places where he has copied "beauties," as they used to say, not his own, and imitations which are merely plagiarisms. Let us admit all these, and then, finding things that are not in Horace, and yet are good, let us be thankful, and read them with real pleasure.

His sixth satire turns upon the tyranny of honour, and while it has a certain Latin air, a reminiscence of Roman inspiration, there is yet some freshness about it. It begins by a complaint that his soul is burthened with a weight heavy enough to break the back of a packhorse:

> 'Tis not because I see on every side
> Folly the monarch; avarice and pride
> In churchmen; justice hawked about for sale;
> The innocent oppressed, the righteous fail;

The council swayed by private interest,
And him who spends the most esteemed the best:
All this I know, but yet another ill
Afflicts my soul, more universal still.
Would I were king for generations twain,[1]
Then would I banish, not to return again,
Banish, and never suffer to recall,
Honour, whose monstrous fetters bind us all,
Who troubles eyes that else might clearly see,
Throwing a glamour on all things that be;
Who ruins nature, and when things are best,
Steps in to mar the joy, and spoil the feast.

After this, we get the inevitable golden age, for which you may read Ovid's "Metamorphoses," or Jean de Meung (see p. 65), or, in fact, almost every poet who ever lived. Thank Heaven! the golden age seems pretty well passed away and played out by this time, never, I trust, to be revived again.

He forgets his Horatian imitations, and goes back to Ovid, when he speaks of himself and his sins:[2]—

No law restrains my passionate soul, no chain
Of destiny, no bar of will, no rein,
To good self-blinded, drifting into ill;
Reason is powerless, argue what it will.
Of my own choice, the sin, the error mine,
My eyes I bandage while the sun doth shine,
Choosing the worse because I love it more,
My sorrow only that the sin is o'er.
A thousand voices tell me, love is joy;
A thousand beauties do my love employ,
And musing here and there, each day I prove
In every woman something new to love.[3]

After which, revelations which we need not translate. He returns again to the subject, one of which he was

[1] Rabelais: "Hon! que ne suis-je roy de France pour quatre-vingts ou cent ans!"

[2] See Ovid, "Amores," el. iv. § ii.

[3] Non est certa meos quæ forma invitet amores;
Centum sunt causæ cur ego semper amem.

only too competent to speak, with more perhaps of wordly pride than of repentance:

If reason feeds on failure, if our eyes
Gain strength from loss, 'tis time that I was wise;
From all my labours lost this lesson prove,
And by experience know the art of love.
After so many hard campaigns endured,
And from the pains of fifty passions cured,
After these wars renewed by day and night,
A veteran warrior I wage the fight.
As some old soldier, locks grown grey in arms,
Unnerved no more by fears and vain alarms,
Calmly surveys the battle, till at length
He now opposes stratagem to strength;
So I, who know each move the game can give,
My happiness by artifice contrive;
Not running here and there like some young fool,
Led by caprice, but guided by this rule,
The more you force, the less you make your way,
And women, cunning, more than strength obey;
Only wait watchful, till some lucky hour
The careless enemy place within your power.

All men are slaves:—

Au joug nous sommes nez, et n'a jamais esté
Homme qu'on ait vu vivre en plaine liberté.

Mankind may be all told off into classes, the distinctions of which are clear and defined. Satirists are always very decided on this point:—

Le soldat aujourdhuy ne resve que la gloire:
En paix le laboureur veut cultiver la terre:
L'avare n'a plaisir qu'en ses doubles ducats:
L'amant juge sa dame un chef d'œuvre icy bas.

Had Regnier lived in these days, he would have found a decided objection to parade the professional jargon at off-times. The lawyer does not talk law; our soldiers may perhaps dream of glory, but they keep their dreams to themselves; the labourer prefers the beershop to the happy fields; and the modern lover,

unless he is under five-and-twenty, an age at which our civilization forbids love, may possibly tell his mistress she is a *chef-d'œuvre* just to please the dear girl, but *he knows better*. And as for the miser, he saves what he can spare after providing himself with a good dinner. You may see the modern miser fat, comely, comfortable, over a glass of port at the club any night. So far we have outgrown satire. Life, indeed, is crossed with every kind of shade, the tints of which melt into one another. Hold up the tissue to the light this way, it is magenta; this way, it is purple. As in nature, so in character, *there are no outlines*, and the verses of the satirist are only like the early pencil drawings of the infant artist with their rough and rude imitations of the real and their thick coarse outlines in black and white.

All men are fools:—

> Je diray librement pour finir en deux mots,
> Que la plus part des gens sont habillez en sots.

It is a great mistake to be a poet:—

> Pour moy, mon amy, je suis fort mal payé
> D'avoir suivy cet art.

It was against the will of his father, as it always is in the case of poets:—

> Sæpe pater dixit, studium quid inutile tentas?
> Mæonides nullas ipse reliquit opes.

It is impossible to please everybody:—

> Bertaut! c'est un grand cas! quoy que l'on puisse faire,
> Il n'est moyen qu'un homme à chacun puisse plaire.

There are in each age of life its own delights, pleasures, and temptations:—

> Reddere qui voces jam scit puer et pede certo
> Signat humum, &c.

And so on. These are the themes of his satires. They

are not by themselves of a nature to tempt one to read further. But in truth the success of a satire depends more upon the form in which it is cast than the novelty of the sentiments, because, after all, we do not invent new vices, and the whole possible field of human folly seems to have been thoroughly explored by this time; although when Carlyle some time since assured the world that men were mostly fools, we all received this astonishing intelligence with a mere rapture of delight, as if it was not only good news, but also a thing quite recently discovered.

Throwing yourself back, therefore, to Regnier's times, try to imagine that these things are absolutely new except to scholars, and that the French dress of a Latin poet is entirely his own invention. You will then find him vigorous, easy, and natural. You will read his portraits, drawn with a rapid and bold pen, with a curiosity which will gradually grow into interest. You will find yourself in the hands of a master who has the merit of reality, who is never a prig, who very seldom puts on the sham indignation of a satirist, who really does succeed in throwing new life into an old trunk, who troubles himself little about rules of art, and who writes as he lives, bound by no chains or restraint of principle, art, or rule.

There is one type which French writers in all ages have fastened on and improved till it has become peculiarly and essentially French. It is that of the hypocrite. Nothing like it exists in classical literature, because hypocrisy could only be, in the nature of things, a weed growing in the soil of an artificial and perfunctory religion, like a good many people's Christianity. We have seen the hypocrite in Rutebeuf and Faux Semblant in Jean de Meung, the latter a perfect and finished sketch,

and before we have the Tartuffe of Molière, the complete and inimitable type, we get the Macette of Regnier. The first part of this satire only is original, the rest is borrowed from Ovid, from Propertius, from Juvenal, perhaps at second-hand, and through the Roman de la Rose. I have translated a portion of the introduction, which sufficiently explains itself:—

Macette the famous, who, from ten years old,
Trained in the lists of love her place to hold,
Weary of conquest, glutted with her spoils,
Weary of weaving nets and setting toils,
Weary, not satiate, renounces love
And turns repentant thoughts to things above.
She who, before these pious tears were shed
Saw but one sky—the sky above her bed,
Aspires, a Christian pattern of distress,
Close on the heels of Magdalene to press;
Her dress a simple robe without pretence,
Her very visage, breathing continence,
Admonishes the world with austere looks
And even priests and preaching monks rebukes.
From convent unto convent still she steals
And for confession at the altar kneels,
She knows the worth of chaplets and of beads,
What an indulgence grants, and what it needs.
Far from the world she plants her hermit cell,
Her weeping eyes a holy-water well;
In short, in this backsliding age a light
Of grace, of penitence, and virtue bright.
A saint acknowledged by the folk at home,
And it is darkly whispered that at Rome
They wait impatiently for her demise
This modern Magdalene to canonize.
Small faith as I in miracles repose,
Believing things I see—nor always those—
Seeing this sudden change from what had been
I thought at last her soul changed with her mien.
"'Tis thus," I cried, "God's grace our errors ends,
That life were bad indeed which never mends."
And moved by her example and her sighs
Began to think 'twas time to do likewise.
When by a special grace of Providence
(Which hates indeed a hypocrite's pretence),

Being alone with her I love one day,
Came that old screech owl, crawling on her way
With slow and solemn step, with pursed-up lips,
And mincing mouth that half the sentence clips;
Gave us a courtesy, as one half afraid
And knowing no more than a convent maid.
After an Ave Mary, she began
Her common jargon—not of love—and ran
On hundred things that my poor girl was fain
To hear in patience, though her little brain
Was full of tender thoughts, for she and I
So happily make all the moments fly,
Loving and loved, that other lovers sigh.

And then . . . then . . . the graceless poet, who has little taste for talk of piety, retires and leaves them alone. But he conceives a desire to hear what they talk about by themselves, and so he listens. And what a conversation it is he hears!

You who know the old woman's discourse in Ovid will know what it is:—

Fors me sermonum testem dedit. Illa monebat
Talia. Me duplices occuluere fores.
* * * *
Scis, hera, te, mea lux, juveni placuisse beato:
Hæsit et in vultu constitit usque tuo.
Et cur non placeas? nulli tua forma secunda est.
Me miseram! dignus corpore cultus abest.

Youth in the eyes of this disreputable old lady is but the autumn of life, while beauty is its harvest; love is the madness of men; riches, the price they must pay for it; while as for honour, virtue, fidelity, religion, these are but the figments by which poor men would win the golden prizes of beauty for nothing. The theme loses nothing in Regnier's hands. He is as easy as Ovid, and as strong. He writes as one inspired, and reading his verses, though the very thoughts and phrases are Ovid's, we know that Macette lived. We think we see

her wagging her wicked old head, and instructing the artless girl:—

> Le péché que l'on cache est demy pardonné:
> La faute seullement ne gist en la défense:
> Le scandale, l'opprobre, est ce qui fait l'offense;
> Pourvu qu'on ne le sache, il n'importe comment.
> Qui peut dire que non, ne pèche nullement.

Did ever astonished moralist hear the like? Tartuffe made use of the same atrocious sentiments in his unfortunate attempt upon Elmire:—

> Le mal n'est jamais que dans l'éclat qu'on fait,
> Le scandale du monde est ce qui fait l'offense,
> Et ce n'est pas pécher que pécher en silence.

One more quotation from Regnier. This time, too, it shall be left in French to show his style. It is the description of the pedant:—

> Il me parle latin, il allègue, il discourt,
> Il reforme à son pied les humeurs de la court;
> Qu'il a pour enseigner une belle manière,
> Qu'en son globe il a veu la matière première:
> Qu'Epicure est yvrongne, Hypocrate un bourreau,
> Que Bartolle et Jason ignorent le barreau;
> Que Virgile est passable encor qu'en quelques pages,
> Il meritast au Louvre estre chiflé des pages:
> Que Pline est inégal, Térence ne peu joly:
> Mais surtout il estime un langage poly.

Such was Regnier, rough and vigorous, one who imitated, but did not copy; where he does not imitate, fresh and strong; where he does, throwing a life of his own into the thoughts and opinions that he borrowed. Full, too, of homely proverbs and sayings—things which would have made the hair of Schoolmaster Boileau to stand on end, and turned his flesh into goose-flesh. "Vous parlez barragouyn," "Vous nous faites des bonadiez," "Je réponds d'un ris de Saint-

Médard," "C'est pour votre beau nez que cela se fait," and so on, locutions actually used by the old women in the Halles. Fountain of Helicon! here was desecration. It is for these things as well as more manifest sins that Boileau speaks, when in the "Art Poétique" he says:—

> De ces maîtres savans disciple ingénieux,
> Regnier seul parmi nous formé sur leur modèle,
> Dans son vieux style encore a des grâces nouvelles.
> Heureux si les discours craints du chaste lecteur
> Ne se sentoient des lieux où fréquentait l'auteur.

Regnier died, unhappily, before he was able to emancipate himself from his bondage to the classical poets, and while preserving their form to breathe into it fully the spirit of his own genius. For one of so robust an intellect as his would assuredly, had he lived longer, have carved out his own line, and made satire in France a thing independent of Horace and Juvenal. I claim for him genius of a high order. He knew how to describe, he knew how to draw portraits, he could be satirical without malice, and he could convey his moral without maddening some unhappy fellow-creature with a hornet's sting. In this respect at least he was above Pope and Dryden.

Sainte-Beuve, in his way, draws a parallel between the two most unlike men (at first sight) in the whole world, Regnier and André Chénier. It is, to be sure, a comparison which consists chiefly of differences, but he has found real points of resemblance between them —in the utter absence of the religious sentiment with both,[1] in the descriptive faculty common to both, in

[1] Some germs of repentance may be found in Regnier, but these when he was already sinking into an early grave, worn out by his excesses.

their reality, in that irresistible force which attracted them both to the society of women. "The styles of André Chénier and of Regnier," he says, "are a perfect model of what our language permits to the genius expressing itself in verse. . . With both the same *procédé*, warm, vigorous, and free, the same luxury and ease of thought, shooting its branches in all directions, with all its interlacings and cross-tracery, the same profusion of happy and familiar irregularities, the same readiness and sagacity of discernment in following the current idea under the transparency of images, and in not allowing it to escape from one image to another, the same marvellous art in carrying on a metaphor to its end. . . . And as to the form and the carriage of the verses of Regnier and Chénier, they seem to me very nearly the same, that is to say, the best possible; curious without effort, easy without negligence, in turn careless and attentive."

A great poet, crippled by his blind adherence to ancient models, not able to extricate himself from the traditions of his time, a disciple of Ronsard who yet hardly learned Ronsard's great lesson, to dare everything, to try everything, to emulate, and not to imitate, the surpassing genius of the past. And, besides all this, which is a potent influence in the life of the artist, a slave to his own passions. Art is a jealous mistress; she will be worshipped alone. St.-Amant failed, as we shall presently see, because he joined the cult of Bacchus to that of the Muses. And Regnier, so far as he did fail, because he worshipped Venus, our Lady of Passion, as well as that other and nobler Venus, our Lady of Art.

Somebody wrote an epitaph for him, which is printed among his collected works as his own. Now, it is given to no man to write his own epitaph, save by an antici-

patory clause in his last will and testament. This is what the epitaph says:—

J'ai vescu sans nul pensement,
Me laissant aller doucement
A la bonne loy naturelle;
Et sy m'estonne fort pourquoi
La mort oza songier à moi
Qui ne songea jamais à elle.

Chapter IX.

SAINT AMANT.

A genoux, enfans débauchez,
Chers confidants de mes péchez.

EARLY in the seventeenth century, the desire fell upon France to laugh. The country had been melancholy for a whole generation; for, with the exception of the Satyre Ménippée and a few squibs, there was nothing at all to laugh at. Literature under Malherbe was solemn; mirth, malice, and merriment seemed well-nigh dead. "Give us," cried the Parisians, "something new and amusing. We have got through all our troubles. King Louis XIII. is, to be sure, a foolish, even a malignant creature, but there are no more sieges and no more blockades; and so let us laugh."

The demand created a supply, and though the Fronde brought fresh civil wars, it left the people, as it found them, laughing. There were Turlupin, Scaramouche, Arlequin, on the stage, and there were Théophile Viaud, D'Assoucy, Scarron, Voiture, Boisrobert among the poets and writers.

It is of this goodly society that we have now to treat. The student of French literature, who must read them,

will find in them no reflection whatever of the artistic efforts of Ronsard and Du Bellay: they are careless as to what Malherbe might have thought: they write by no rules of art, but can defend themselves on attack; and they pour out their songs regardless of any criticism but the voice of the people. It is characteristic of French literature that the best poets have been those who have dared to belong to no school. Rutebeuf and Adam de la Halle are free. Olivier Basselin owes no man aught, and Villon is independent. It is this same quality of independence that I claim for Saint Amant, La Fontaine, Béranger. Not only are they all independent of rules, but they are all alike in one respect; for, the conditions of their lives and characters being different, the French spirit remains common to all. And then the leaders of the schools of style have got nothing to say. What is the charm in Ronsard? It is but the charm of surprise that things said so often before could be said again with so much delicacy. Nor is it till the impression is gone, that one discovers the entire absence of strength. And so the Pleiad never became popular, never exchanged its character as an artistic circle for that of popular poets. Cold, mannered, graceful, they gave dignity to a literature daily becoming, before their time, more discreditable; and they helped those who were to follow how best to say what they found to say. Of those who delighted Paris in the seventeenth century before Boileau appeared, I propose to select Saint Amant, not only because he is the least disreputable, but also because he is the truest poet. And it seems to me worth the trouble of exhuming this dead and forgotten writer,[1] if

[1] Not dead and forgotten in his own country. His works are published in the "Bibliothèque Elzévirienne."

only to add one more human figure to the English gallery of French worthies.

Marc-Antoine Gérard, sieur de Saint Amant, was born at Rouen, 1594, and came of a good old fighting stock; his father, a gentleman adventurer, having been one of Queen Elizabeth's sea captains, and, perhaps while fighting an English ship, was taken prisoner by the Turks. His uncle, too, served a captivity on the galleys of Constantinople, and both his brothers died fighting the infidels. They sailed to India in search of fortune, for there was no money in the Saint Amant family, and off the mouth of the Red Sea—what was the ship doing there ?—they were attacked by a "Moorish" corvette. One brother was killed, the other "escaped by swimming," a very remarkable statement, as one naturally wonders where he swam to. Socotra, Aden, and the land of the Somaulis have never held out anything but a hostile club to the visitor, and the nearest friendly port would be Goa, while to swim fifteen hundred miles, exposed to the danger of sun stroke, must have been a perilous journey indeed. However, the swimmer escaped, which was the great thing for him, and lived to fight the Turk again, getting killed at last in Cyprus, under the Venetian flag. While these stirring events were going on in his family, the young poet was getting himself educated—he never knew any Latin or Greek —at Rouen. Biographers, always on the look-out for examples of precocity, have got nothing more characteristic to tell of him than that he fell three times into the River Seine off the quay, and was nearly drowned on each occasion. It is charming to get these characteristic anecdotes. What a flood of light is thrown on a great man when we know how the button came off his jacket.

He came to Paris young, and began at once to write verses, having among his earliest friends that profligate and unlucky bard, Théophile Viaud. At the age of five-and-twenty, Saint Amant brought out his first and best poem, called "Solitude." On no other single production of his would I be content to rest his claim to be a poet; but this is by itself enough. He takes us into the forest; we wander with him among the aged trees, born long ago, "at the very nativity of time," watching the birds, the waving of the branches, the lake with the herons and the wild fowl, the long glades stretching right and left, and while he bids us mark the absence of man's handiwork, the glamour of the scene falls upon us and we forget the poet, his art, ourselves. This it is to be a poet; this power it is which makes some simple ballad live in people's hearts while all the verses of the scholars are forgotten: it is the absence of this power which kills the newly-fledged versifier, though all the critics unite in calling him poet.

Nor winter's frost nor summer's heat
Hath seen upon this silent sheet
  Sledge, boat, or vessel leave the land;
Nor shall, till earth and time are spent.
No thirsty traveller here hath bent
  And made a cup with curving hand.
Never did traitor hook ensnare
  The foolish fish for angler's prey;
And never stag, in mad despair,
  Here stayed the chase and turned to bay.

We leave the forest. Presently we find ourselves before a ruined castle, solitary and deserted.

. . . See how year by year the walls
  Of yon old ruins grey and hoar
Grow smaller still as on them falls
  Time's talon, tearing more and more.

Here now the witches hold their tryst,
  Here elves and fairies revels keep,
Who all for mischief, as they list,
  Our senses cheat and plague our sleep;
And here, in corners out of sight,
Are snakes of day and birds of night.

The screech owl with her cries of woe
  (Sinister sound to mortal ear)
Wakes up the imps who come and go
  With laughter wild and goblin cheer;
Under a cross tree in the air
  Swings to and fro the skeleton
Of some poor swain, who in despair
  This deed upon himself hath done,
Long since—because a woman's face
Had for him neither smile nor grace.

On the old rafters bent and worn
  Decipher, if you can, the name;
See on the marbles, moss o'ergrown,
  The scutcheon of an ancient fame.
Beneath a mighty walnut's shade
  Growing deep down within the fosse,
The highest turret roof is laid
  Conceal'd with ivy and with moss:
And mark o'er all the silver slime
Where snails and vermin creep and climb.

Do you remember anything of this kind before Saint Amant? I do not. It seems to me that here is a great advance. We have reality, truth, vigour, feeling. There is not, to be sure, the delicate handling of De Baïf; not the conscientious form of Du Bellay; but we are with a more vigorous poet. Young Saint Amant can give utterance in part to those thoughts which defy language; they are the thoughts of youth, those that come when the mind is yet in the delicate chlorine green of childhood, when all the world is a wonder, and the imagination throws out long rays of light, like the first bright streaks of the rising sun, to the four corners of the earth. Would that the poet had preserved his

thoughts of youth and early manhood! With him, as with most of us, the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, came to beat down, crush, and kill. When we look again, behold the flaming poppies and the tares.

He is next at Belleisle, companion, dependant on the Duke de Retz. Here he lives for many years, writing songs and singing them, drinking and carousing. For Saint Amant has taken to intemperate ways. It is recorded of him that he once sat out, with the Marquis of Belleisle, a debauch of four-and-twenty hours. But the voice of fame always exaggerates, and perhaps it was only four hours after all. Leaving the Duke de Retz, he went with another patron, the Count d'Harcourt,[1] Admiral of the French fleet, on his voyages, seeing the world and making observations. With him was Secretary Furet, and they were all three, the admiral, the secretary, and the poet, on the best possible terms with each other. In the cabin, shut out from the ship, discipline was relaxed, and distinctions of rank merged in the nicknames of good fellowship, the admiral being *le Rond*, Furet *le Vieux*, and Saint Amant *le Gros*.

In 1638, he returned to Paris—no more of such poems as the "Solitude" to be written there—and made new friends. After the troubles of the Fronde were over—Mazarin was goodnatured to some of his enemies—he won the good graces of Marie Gonzague,

[1] This is the Count d'Harcourt of Condé's epigram, written when he joined Mazarin:—

That soldier fat and short,
Renown'd in story,
The noble Count d'Harcourt,
Brimful of glory,
Who raised Cazal and took Turin,
Is bailiff now to Mazarin.

Queen of Poland. He went with her to Poland, made odes upon her whenever she happened to be in an interesting condition, and got a pension, with which he returned to Paris. There he was made a *gentilhomme verrier*, a glass manufacturer,—it was not considered derogatory to a gentleman to pursue this calling—and then, in spite of Boileau's lines—

> Qu'arriva-t-il enfin de sa muse abusée?
> Il en revint couvert de honte et de risée.
> Et la fièvre au retour terminant son destin
> Fit par avance en lui ce qu'auroit fait la faim—

lived and died in considerable comfort.

Like Oliver Goldsmith, Tom Moore, Horace, and others of the poetic vein, Gérard de Saint Amant was short of stature, round and fat. See him as he stands at the door of the "Fir Apple," waiting for his friend Furet to come and clink glasses with him. He is fresh-coloured and sun-burnt, because he has been tanned by the sea-breezes; his eyes are soft, because he is a tender-hearted creature; his brown hair is curly—straight-haired men are only imitators; his face is broad and laughing, because he never harbours resentment against any living soul; his look is careless, because he takes no more thought for the morrow than the sparrows; there are no crows'-feet about his eyes, though he is past forty, because he has no troubles of his own and cares nothing for other people's troubles. The pretty women pass up and down the street, but the honest poet has no eyes for beauty; they may dress, if they please, for other young fellows of forty-five, but he is too fat for love. And in his hand he bears a lute, no allegorical thing which he, the actor, may pretend to twang while the orchestra plays, but a real serviceable lute, on which he discourses sweet music. As he plays, see how his

face changes like a hill-side on an April day—from mirth to sadness, from sadness to mirth; for he has Saul-like fits of melancholy which only the lute can dispel:—

> Whenas to chase the thoughts of grief and pain
> Which lie like lead upon my aching brain,
> I take my lute, and in its accents find
> Content for sadness, rest for troubled mind.
> My fingers, idly wandering here and there,
> Sadden the cadence, sympathise the air;
> A thousand half tones, tearful, sad, and clear,
> Wake in long sighs and vibrate on the ear;
> Trembling they hover on the inspired string,
> Weep with my tears and with my sorrows ring,
> Their dying accents, as they fainter grow,
> Singing laments for me, my life, my woe.

Only a musician could have written these lines—they are real. His reality, indeed, is the one grand virtue with Saint Amant, for he is never acting a part, and if he laughs it is because he is merry; if he weeps it is because he is sad. To be sure, he is not often sad; but lest you should think from the examples that follow that he was always singing of Bacchus and wine, read the following, one of the earliest sonnets extant in praise of tobacco:—

> Upon a faggot seated, pipe in lips,
> Leaning my head against the chimney wall,
> My heart sinks in me, down my eyelids fall,
> As all alone I think on life's eclipse.
>
> Hope, that puts off to-morrow for to-day,
> Essays to change my sadness for awhile
> And shows me with her kind and youthful smile
> A fate more glorious than men's words can say.
>
> Meantime the herb in ashes sinks and dies;
> Then to its sadness back my spirit flies,
> And the old troubles still rise up behind.
> Live upon hope and smoke your pipe: all's one.
> It means the same when life is passed and done;
> One is but smoke, the other is but wind.

He was elected one of the earliest, not the first, member of the French Academy (see p. 220), and was excused the customary oration at introduction on promising to contribute to the dictionary all the burlesque words. He promised, and contributed nothing, but so got off his speech.

Whether he is writing humorous or serious verses, he depends always on his powers of description. His "Chambre du Débauché," which unfortunately must not be translated, is almost startling in its fidelity. In the "Rome Ridicule" he attacks, in what seems to us to be bad taste, the enthusiasm of antiquaries, and the rage for ancient monuments. The thing itself having gone, or else diverted into other channels, we have lost the sense of fun in laughing at it. That enthusiasm which once hoped everything from the classics, lingers now only among those who hope everything from the remoter antiquities of Assyria and Egypt. For a cold spirit of measurement as well as of doubt has crept in, and while we no longer regard the Tiber with the veneration of old, even the Jordan has had its critics. But in Saint Amant's days the scholars were a lively nuisance, with their contempt for everything not classical, their slavery to ancient forms, their quarrels, and their pedantry. Poor Saint Amant knew neither Latin nor Greek—we have seen how he was too busy falling into the Seine to learn either—and the memory of many an indirect insult envenomed the pen that wrote "Rome Ridicule." He went to England and wrote a "heroicomique" ode on Albion, from which I gather that my countrymen have improved in most particulars since that year. He is a furious Cavalier, as were all Frenchmen, and calls the Puritans "ces malignes Testes-Rondes."

Ces Turcs ont cassé les vitres,
Croyant bien, en mesme temps,
De cent temples esclatants
En effacer les saints litres.

It is time to give a specimen of his lighter verse. The following is an ode, invocation, or address to Bacchus:—

In idle rhymes we waste our days,
With yawning fits for all our praise,
While Bacchus, god of mirth and wine,
Invites us to a life divine.
Apollo, prince of bards and prigs,
May scrape his fiddle to the pigs;
And for the Muses, old maids all,
Why let them twang their lyres, and squall
Their hymns and odes on classic themes,
Neglected by their sacred streams.
As for the true poetic fire,
What is it but a mad desire?
While Pegasus himself, at best,
Only a horse must be confess'd;
And he must be an ass indeed,
Who would bestride the winged steed.

Bacchus, thou who watchest o'er
All feasts of ours, whom I adore
With each new draught of rosy wine
That makes my red face like to thine—
By thy ivied coronet,
By this glass with rubies set,
By thy thyrsus—fear of earth—
By thine everlasting mirth,
By the honour of the feast,
By thy triumphs, greatest, least,
By thy blows, not struck, but drunk,
With king and bishop, priest and monk,
By the jesting, keen and sharp,
By the violin and harp,
By thy bells, which are but flasks,
By our sighs which are but masks
Of mirth and sacred mystery,
By thy panthers fierce to see,
By this place so fair and sweet,
By the he-goat at thy feet,

By Ariadne, buxom lass,
By Silenus on his ass,
By this sausage, by this stoup,
By this rich and thirsty soup,
By this pipe from which I wave
All the incense thou dost crave,
By this ham, well spiced, long hung,
By this salt and wood-smoked tongue,
Receive us in the happy band
Of those who worship glass in hand.
And, to prove thyself divine,
Leave us never without wine.

This invocation to the god of wine is followed by the liveliest, brightest letter possible to his friend Furet. It simply invites him to leave Fontainebleau and return to Paris. Here is some of it. Mark how he changes his mood from grave to gay:—

But why from Paris art thou torn?
Was it a sudden yearning, born
Of the sweet spring; once more to see
The rocks, the trees, the forest free,
The lake reflecting on its breast
The foliage deep, the earth at rest,
And while the sky is warm and still
To mark how over tree and hill,
As if they dread the thunder near,
Vibrate the trembling waves of air;
To mark how in their wayward guise
Hover and flit the butterflies,
As bright as if they were indeed
The very flowers on which they feed?

* * * *

Or else, alone and pensive, while
You ponder 'neath the greenwood aisle
On some far back mysterious theme
Fit subject for a poet's dream,
To find some dark and sombre glen
Fitting your sadden'd soul, and then
Deep in the darkest shade to write
Verse worthy of the brightest light.

* * * *

Is it for fancies grave or gay,
My friend, you leave us? Prithee, say.

Furet, they cry, is absent yet
From tavern and from cabaret;
He rhymes no more of cups and wine—
Unworthy follower of the vine.
And Bacchus, king of me and thee,
By well-known law, hath made decree
Thou shalt not drink, save that alone
Which flows along the Seine or Rhône.
Thou friend of water?—couldst *thou* go,
For Paris taking Fontainebleau?
Paris—where Bacchus holds all hearts;
Paris, where Coiffier [1] bakes his tarts;
Paris where Cormier [2] hangs his sign,
An apple-tree that points to wine;
Paris, which offers to our eyes
Another apple; [3] greater prize
Than that of gold, which by belief
Brought gods and goddesses to grief;
An apple from the tall fir-tree—
Thou know'st that it has shelter'd thee.
Paris, that cemetery vast,
Where all our griefs are buried fast;
Paris, that little world, in short,
Of sweet delight and pleasant sport;
Paris, whose joys bring more content
Than heart can wish or brain invent.

Ha! see. My words begin to press,
You speak not, but your eyes confess:
You cannot leave our Paris till
Yourself you leave, against your will.

Leave care to other, duller heads;
Leave lakes to fish, to cows the meads;
Let wild beasts watch for April showers;
Let snails eat up the sweet wild flowers;
And—bless me—now I mark your face,—
Once brimming o'er with mirthful grace,—
I never saw a change so great:
Come back, come back, 'tis not too late.

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[1] A well-known restaurateur and confectioner.
[2] A cabaret kept by Cormier, which means an "apple tree."
[3] The sign of the "Fir Apple."

For sure the air that suits you best
Where corks fly out and glasses clink;
Where singers sing, and jesters jest,
Where waiters wait and drinkers drink;
Will please you more, I know, I know,
Than all the woods of Fontainebleau.

When Saint Amant grew old, the religious sentiment awakened again within his soul, a phenomenon which may be remarked in most of the portraits in our gallery. Then, with the view to a more lasting fame than that to be got from odes, and with an eye to the welfare of his soul, he wrote a long epic called "Moyse Sauvé." This published, and after a little happiness in calling himself the Gros Virgile, the penitent poet sat down and died. The less said about the epic the better: Burns, indeed, might as well have tried to write an epic.

Hard and scornful things, from the standpoint of morality, as well as that of art, may be said about Saint Amant. He wrote things that he should not have written; he indulged in the habit of drinking to excess; he was a dependant; he exercised no active virtues whatever; and when at last he repented, he was like that Lancashire convert, who lamented his sins in the well-known hymn—

I rept and I rore, I cursed and I swore:
Oh! Lord, what a sinner I beed.

Yet, without too much special pleading, we may make out a very fair case for him. He is good-nature itself—Frenchmen to be sure are nearly always good-natured; he has not a single enemy; his laugh is contagious; his voice is so musical that his verses, when he reads them, ring in the ears like the accents of the Psalmist; his soul is touched by all things in nature; when he strikes the lute he brings the tears into his hearers' eyes—and his

own too; if he goes into the country he marks the things that only a poet discerns; if into the town, he has eyes to note the contrasts, and a pen to write them down. In his tavern, with the *cliquetis* of the glasses round him, amid the fumes of the wine and the tobacco, he can write sweetly, naturally, delicately. Then, though he is a dependant, he is never a parasite. A gentleman he is born, a gentleman he remains, and, like a gentleman, he will not descend to abuse a religion which he respects, though he does not practise it; and he has one of those rare and happy natures which seem to require no effort for the maintenance of self-respect.

Nature gave him the poetic instinct. He had no rules of art, because he never studied, but his taste was correct. It is a pity that we have no self-written record of those younger days when doubtless he was sometimes in love. One wants to know something more of the mind of Saint Amant. Only, these poets do so exaggerate and deck out the passion of love that we, poor creatures of clay, are dazzled and confused, never knowing how far they are real, and are led to confound our own deepest emotions with the passing fancy of a poet for an Amaryllis in the shade.

Chapter X.

VOITURE AND BENSERADE.

A mellifluous voice, as I am true knight.—*Twelfth Night.*

LET us leave the cabarets and go into decent society, even the very best, that of Madame de Rambouillet, Madame de Longueville, and Angélique Paulet, "la Lionne." We are to wander now along the leafy avenues of Chantilly, and sit in the blue room of the Hôtel de Rambouillet. No profane and violent words will be heard here, nor any of those things which agitate the human heart outside; no love—that is, no passion; nothing rude, coarse, or harsh. We are in the highest circle possible, calm, placid, well fed, with the court poets.

There were other poets of society, but the two I have selected are foremost: these two may be taken as the perfect types of their kind. They are the pattern, the envy of all the rest. They write songs for ballets, the prettiest and most ingenious possible. They address odes to ladies' eyes, to ladies' lips, to ladies' noses; write sonnets to ladies' lapdogs—and to their husbands; they manufacture verses for *bouts-rimés;* they write

lines for the maids of honour separately and collectively; they devote all their lives, these benevolent persons, to promoting the gaiety and amusement of their fellow-creatures.

Benserade, for his part, had no life to speak of. That is to say, it was a life all of the same colour, in which any one week was a sample of all the rest. His father was a *procureur* at Gisors, his mother being able to claim kinship in some way with Cardinal Richelieu. The young man was going up to Paris, was introduced to the notice of the great minister, and taking orders [1] by way of assuring his future, obtained some place or pension in acknowledgment of certain dramatic successes, and probably thought it best to say little about cousinship till the minister died. When this lamentable event, which drove many hundreds of hungry dramatists, poets, and artists adrift, took place, Benserade, with the rest, lost his pension. He then attached himself to the Duke de Brézé, and remained with him till he was killed in the wars two or three years afterwards. After this he returned to Paris, and found favour with the Queen Dowager and Cardinal Mazarin. From them he got half-a-dozen pensions, and, as the story-books say, lived happy ever after.

A man of polished manners, not an open profligate

[1] We may partly understand this readiness to take orders with no other call than the call of hunger, by the following extract from the "Turkish Spy." "There are," he says, "in France, 12 archbishoprics, 104 bishoprics; convents of the greater order, 540; convents of the lesser order, 12,320; abbeys, 1,450; nunneries, 67; 708 friaries, 259 seminaries of the Order of the Knights of Malta, 27,400 parish churches, 540 hospitals, and 9,000 private chapels or oratories. To fill all these, they reckon 226,000 religious, besides 130,000 priests." And this state of things lasted till the Revolution!

like Boisrobert, or a drunkard like Chapelle; nor an atheist like Bautru; a man who in spite of continual amourettes gave little cause for scandal to his cloth: one whose delight was to haunt *salons* and *ruelles*, to sit among ladies, read them his poems, hear their praises, and pay them compliments, one whose whole pleasure was in social success, to say an occasional good thing, and to hear it repeated everywhere, as the latest *bon-mot* of Benserade the witty, Benserade the ingenious.

Surrounded as man always is by things of which his tastes and inclinations disapprove, prevented by all sorts of hedges from going his own way, one is prepared to hear that our Abbé's life was not altogether free from the cares and troubles which affect less fortunate men. It might have been, for instance, matter of self-congratulation to him, as a priest, that he loved not those excitements which are accompanied by danger. But it was unfortunate that malicious persons, Scarron for instance, could tell of him how, being once with the Duke of Brézé in a naval engagement, he was found in the hold crouched among the casks, bellowing like Panurge, and how some kind friend maliciously pointing out to him that he was in the most dangerous part of the ship, he cried in an ecstasy of terror, "Alas! alas! where then shall I hide myself?"

Again, once he was promoted to the embassy to Stockholm, but in the midst of his pride at this preferment, it was taken away from him.

The disappointment alone was enough, without Scarron making the event, as he did, the most important of the year, speaking of it as the year when

> . . . le sieur de Benserade
> N'alla point en son ambassade.

Another disagreeable incident in his life may be men-

tioned to show the instability of a satirist's power, and the great danger, after he has established a laugh, of laughing himself "the wrong side of his mouth." For he permitted himself not only to write poems to the ladies of the court, but also on them. And once, instigated by the Evil One, he produced the following epigram on Madame de Châtillon:—

Chastillon, gardez vos appas
Pour quelque autre conqueste,
Si vous estes preste
Le Roy ne l'est pas ;
Avecque vous il cause,
Mais, en vérité,
Il faut quelque autre chose
Pour vostre beauté
Qu'une minorité.

"Really," said the lady, "I am excessively obliged to you, M. de Benserade, for making this pretty little song about me." "And really, M. de Benserade," said her husband, "if it ever happens to you to speak of Madame de Châtillon again, I will break every bone in your body." The bones in his body were not broken, because he refrained for the future, but this kind of thing is unpleasant in more than one way. It is apt to take the spirit out of the satirist, especially if he be deficient in physical courage, to cramp his flight, to limit his field, and then, which is as bad, it makes other people laugh. Scarron, for example, named another year as—

L'an que le Sieur de Benserade
Fut menacé de bastonnade.

In his capacity as court poet and wit, Benserade had a formidable rival in Voiture, whose verses were at least as good as his own, and whose personal attractions were greater. For Voiture was a handsome, well-

made, dapper little man, full of life, spirits, and mischief; the licensed favourite of everybody, and permitted by the ladies to take as many liberties as he pleased. Once in the presence of the Princess de Bourbon, feeling cold in the toes, he pulled off his shoes, and warmed his feet at the fire. Once, too, thinking it would be a capital joke, he put a couple of bears into the bedroom of Madame de Rambouillet, frightening the poor lady nearly to death. Another time he knocked up the Count de Guiche at two in the morning, and when he appeared awake and dressed told him gravely that knowing the interest which the count took in his affairs, he had called to let him know he was thinking of being married.

The circle of Madame de Rambouillet was far, indeed, from being dull or reserved. Pedantic, after the fashion of the age in literary matters, and of doubtful taste, in its social side it was full of life, laughter, and enjoyment. They asked for a perpetual variety in conversation; they aimed at those little subtleties of wit which evade translation, even if they bear to be written down at all; they made great fuss and importance out of very little things; they studied the art of *badinage*, knowing above all, when to stop. Voiture was a perfect master of the art. For instance, Madame de Rambouillet having declared herself an admirer of King Gustavus Adolphus, he sent her a letter brought by six gentlemen disguised as Swedes, pretending to be from the king; and when he was in Algiers he wrote to Angélique Paulet, called by her friends, *la Lionne*, in the name of "Léonard, keeper of the lions of the King of Morocco."

It was a life of trifling, if you please, but the trifling was elegant, innocent, and pure. No circle ever ex-

isted which was more harmless, more useful as an example, than that of this celebrated hôtel. They could have, and did have, their little breezes, tempers, and jealousies. Where two or three women are gathered together, these may be looked for. But they pulled well together, and loved each other, madame, her daughters, Madame de Longueville and the divine Angélique, with a strange affection. Above all, they would have nothing discourteous, nothing rough, nothing unmannerly, nothing coarse. The only thing out of place in the blue room was Chapelain with his old coat and unwashed linen. The only person permitted to take liberties was Voiture, who could do what he pleased anywhere; who, besides, was to be trusted not to go too far. It was a great educational establishment, whither repaired the rough unruly lords of the court, fresh from the country, to learn that there are things to be respected as well as a scutcheon, reputations other than a title can confer, and things that may be made the subject of mirth, other than those bawled in the cabarets and whispered in the corridors.

But full of tricks, quaint jests, espiéglerie. Once Voiture brought Madame de Rambouillet a sonnet which he considered better than anything he had ever done before. "I think," said the lady, taking it, "that I have seen it already." He assured her that she was mistaken, because the sonnet was bran new; but the next day she showed him his own sonnet *printed in a book*. He was confounded. He read it again and again; repeated his own lines to himself; compared them, and finally put it down to an extraordinary freak of memory, which had led him to write out a poem he had read and remembered, thinking he was composing it himself. He went about telling everybody of this

singular accident, till Madame de Rambouillet confessed that she had herself got the sonnet printed from his own copy, and imposed it upon him as an old one. Of all practical jokes, surely the most amusing and the most harmless.

On another occasion, Voiture had been sent to amuse Mlle. de Bourbon (afterwards Madame de Longueville), who was suffering from some indisposition. He was not in his usual spirits that day, and only succeeded in making her more melancholy. The Rambouillet ladies pretended to be extremely angry with him for his failure, and actually—but read his own account of his punishment, written to the lady herself, who had left Paris.

I was, he says, tossed in a blanket[1] on Friday after dinner because I had not succeeded in making you laugh in the time given me. Madame de Rambouillet gave judgment on the matter at the request of her daughter and Mlle. Paulet. They had intended to defer execution till your return, but considered afterwards that it was not right to put off punishment so long, nor to a time wholly given up to joy. It was no use crying out, the blanket was brought, and four of the strongest men in the world chosen to perform the execution. What I can assure you, mademoiselle, is, that no one ever flew up so high as I. I doubt whether I deserved that Fortune should raise me to so great an elevation. At each toss, I rose clean out of their sight, higher than the eagles fly, with the mountains flattened out beneath me, and the winds and clouds rolled below my

[1] Tossing in a blanket was then a favourite amusement, now happily gone out of fashion, with other pursuits that required more evenness of temper than our ancestors have bequeathed to us. Thus Saint Amant writes of this pastime:

Tenez bien, roidissez les coings.
Y estes-vous ? serrez les poings,
Et faisons sauter jusqu'aux nues
Par des secousses continues,
Sans crier jamais, " C'est assez ! "
Ny que nos bras la soient lassez,
Cette sorcière à triple étage.

feet. At this extraordinary elevation I discovered countries of which I knew nothing, and seas of which I had never heard. You can imagine nothing so diverting as thus to get a whole half of the world spread out before your eyes. But it is not, I assure you, mademoiselle, without a certain anxiety that we observe all these things, because it is impossible to forget the coming down again. One of the things which frightened me most while high in the air, was the looking down and seeing how small the blanket appeared and how impossible it seemed to fall back into it. This naturally caused me some emotion. Among other curious objects that I saw there was one, however, which took away all fear from me. It was when, turning my eyes towards Piedmont, I discerned yourself, mademoiselle, at Lyons, crossing the Saône. At least I saw on the water a great light, with many rays round the most lovely face in the world. Directly I came down I told them what I had seen. Would you believe it? They only laughed, and tossed me up again higher than ever.

To be tossed in a blanket, and after dinner, would be more than enough to disturb the equanimity—and digestion—of any degenerate man of modern days. Yet Voiture actually went through this misery with hilarity, and pretended to like it. No doubt the kind ladies only put him gently in the blanket and made belief to toss him. Had they meant really to do it, I am sure it would have been done *before* dinner.

Voiture's poems are purely *vers de société*, written for the occasion, not even corrected, as he pretended, at all events, not polished. There is not a single one of them serious. All are light, frothy, sparkling. So are those of Benserade. *Vers de société*, like port, champagne, coffee, and many other excellent things, are only good when fresh. With the years the aroma disappears, and the readers of this century may well ask for the causes of their popularity two hundred years ago. To understand that, you must know the times and the men. Then you will see in these little frivolous sketches ingenuity of phrase, lightness of style, a delicate toning of flattery—not too strong, observe, but laid on in soft

and insidious tints which do not at first catch the eye, but presently please it insensibly ; half shades of praise and sarcasm, love-making behind a mask, a certain air of confidential relationship with the reader, as one of a privileged set, and a series of little asides—all these are in Voiture and Benserade, and make them, once you know them and their circle and themselves, readable, if not worth reading. Do not, however, carry away the impression that I recommend you to read them, if your time is valuable. At least they are pure and innocent.

Some of Voiture has been translated. It was a hundred and fifty years ago and more. The ingenious gentleman who did it was *un nommé* Webster. I may fairly say that there exist no translations of any poem or set of poems so utterly and miserably bad as these. One says so without ill-nature, because the author is presumably dead, unless indeed he was the Wandering Jew, who was a good deal about Western Europe at that time, frequently taking supper, for instance, with the Turkish spy.

Mr. Webster's failure was not altogether his fault, except that he over-estimated his powers. How can you translate, for instance, the following verses—written to Mlle. Bourbon at Chantilly, to a popular air of the day ?—

Madame, vous trouverez bon
Qu'on vous écrive sur le ton
De Landrirette,
Qui court maintenant à Paris,
Landriri.

Votre absence nous abat tous :
Quelques-uns en sont demi-fous,
Landrirette :
Les autres n'en sont qu'étourdis,
Landriri.

Du point de votre éloignement
L'hiver s'approche à tout moment,
Landrirette ;
Et les beaux jours sont accourcis,
Landriri.

L'on est ici fort tristement ;
Tout notre divertissement,
Landrirette,
Est de chanter à qui s'ensuit,
Landriri.

En grâce, en beautés, en attraits
Nulle n'égalera jamais,
Landrirette,
La divine Montmorency,
Landriri.

Among the hangers-on at the hôtel was an unfortunate poet named Neufgermain, a source of perpetual amusement and ridicule to all of them. Voiture the ingenious imagined one day a rebellion of all those letters of the alphabet which had not the honour of forming part of the name of this great and famous bard. Jupiter attempts to appease the commotion:—

Well you know, illustrious band,
Servants ever true and tried
(Yours the aid that in my hand
Placed the sceptre and the pride),
Consultation long we had
Ere that noble name we made.

By a forethought quite divine,
In the name, whose echoes sound
Like a trumpet clear and fine,
Vowels four their place have found.
But, my consonantal friends,
Here my godlike forethought ends.

B and C with S and L,
P and T with them combined,
Share of glory claim as well
In this name a place to find ;
Even, I regret to say,
Useless Q must join the fray.

B, who makes our Blessings real,
B, without whose potent arm
Beauty we could never feel;
C, too, queen of every Charm,
Swear to seek the shades below
If they must this fame forego.

Then comes P, with haughty eye—
He alone makes half a Pope—
Prayer gives up and Piety
If we grant him not his hope;
Nothing more remains but this—
Patience—with Paralysis.

T comes next—and this is grave—
For our Thunder T doth lead,
Threatens too our ranks to leave;
Why, if P and T secede,
Power and Thunder both are gone,
Leaving us an empty throne.

Come then, be contented all,
Nothing else I see but this.
Call him—as the letters fall,
See you, each, that none doth miss—
Call him, though the name be quaint,
Sir Bdelneufghermicropsant.

Mademoiselle de Bourbon said that Voiture ought to be preserved in sugar; his portrait at least is drawn in honeyed sweetness by Mlle. de Scudéri, in the "Grand Cyrus," under the name of Callicrates:—

The third was a man of humble birth, named Callicrates, who by his *esprit* was raised to terms of equality with whatever there was of greatness at Paphos, both among ladies and men. He wrote agreeably in verse and prose, and in a style so gallant and unusual that it might almost be said that he invented it: at least I know that no one has ever imitated it, and I think that no one ever will, for out of the purest trifle he would produce a delightful letter, and out of the most sterile subject, the lowest, the most common, he would produce something agreeable and brilliant. His conversation was very diverting on certain days, but it was unequal, and there were moments when he wearied the world as much as it wearied

him. In fact there was a delicacy in his intellect which might almost be called caprice, so excessive was it. His person was not remarkably well made, but he made the open profession of gallantry. . . .

If Voiture loved anybody it was Angélique Paulet, "la Lionne," but I think he gave up the idea of marriage very early. His birth prevented him from marrying any of the ladies he met in his circle, and his inclinations prevented him from marrying beneath that rank. He was a gambler, and unlike Benserade, was as pugnacious as a terrier, always ready to fight. He died young, before he was forty years of age.

After the death of Voiture, Benserade wrote his celebrated "Job" sonnet. It was prefixed to a poetical paraphrase of that poem, and compared his own sufferings and patience with those of the great Sheikh, with a leaning in favour of himself. Of course it occurred to nobody that there was bad taste in this. The sonnet, not the paraphrase—the Book of Job not being favourite reading—was at first immensely admired. Everybody read it, and everybody went into raptures over it, until, in an evil moment, somebody asked the question whether it was better than Voiture's sonnet to Uranie. The question was like the golden apple, for it produced angry battles, the consumption of oceans of ink, bad tempers, and much disputation. Parties were formed and sides taken. The Prince de Conti headed the party of the *Jobelins*, or supporters of Benserade; his sister, Madame de Longueville, was the chief of the *Uranians*. Then—but why write the history of the squabble? You will find it in the chronicles of the times.

Only, as I am quite sure the two sonnets have never yet been put together in an English form, let me, in

rivalry with the late Mr. Webster, give you the two. The first is Voiture's:—

It rests, to end with love of Uranie,
  Absence nor time may cure me of this pain;
Nothing to help, nothing to ease, I see,
  Nothing to win my liberty again.

Long time I know her rigour, but I think
  Still on her beauty—wherefore I must die;
Content I fall, blessing my doom I sink,
  Nor aught against her tyrant rigour cry.

But sometimes Reason feebly lifts her voice,
Bids me throw off this thraldom, and rejoice:
  Then when I listen and her aid would prove,
After all efforts spent, in mere despair,
She says that Uranie alone is fair,
  And, more than all my senses, bids me love.

That is Voiture.

Now hear the gallant Abbé:—

Job, with a thousand troubles cursed,
  Here shows you what his troubles were,
And as he goes from worse to worst,
  Asks for your sympathetic tear.

Behold his story, simple, plain,
  Told by himself for your fair eyes:
And steel your heart to watch the pain
  Of one who suffers, one who sighs.

Yet think—although he suffer'd much,
His troubles great, his patience such—
  That some may still more patient be;
To all the listening world he groaned,
His pains to every friend bemoaned;
  I, silent, suffer more than he.

For my own part, I think the two sonnets, in translation at least, of equal merit. Let us give them an "Honorary Fourth."

Voiture died in 1648. Benserade not till many years later. At seventy he posed a theatrical farewell to Love:—

Adieu, fortune, honneurs : adieu, vous et les vôtres,
Je viens ici tout oublier :
Adieu, toi-même, Amour ; bien plus que tous les autres
Difficile à congédier.

Then he retired to his little house at Chantilly, where he paraphrased Psalms, read madrigals, wrote sonnets on his trees, and odes on everything. Like the trees themselves, they have all perished and we regret them no more. At the advanced age of eighty-one he died, being killed by the bungling of a surgeon who cut an artery, and then ran away leaving him to bleed to death. Senecé wrote an epitaph for him :—

Three marvellous gifts had this wonderful man,
Posterity, read, and believe if you can ;
He was satirist, yet had no hatred to fear,
For his satire, was liked none the worse ;
He was ever in love till his eightieth year,
And found fortune in writing of verse.

Chapter XI.

THE PARASITES.

You see how all conditions, how all minds
(As well of glib and slippery creatures as
Of grave and austere quality) tender down
Their services to Lord Timon.—*Timon of Athens.*

THE French nobles of the seventeenth century invented a method of beguiling the tedium of life quite peculiar to themselves, greatly superior to the old plan of keeping a fool, and illustrative of their stage of civilization. They kept a scholar. The qualifications necessary for any candidate for this office were good manners, scholarship, an unfailing stock of high spirits, power of repartee, discretion, so as to know when to stop, the power of writing *vers d'occasion*, and the gift of mimicry. The emoluments of the post were a free run of the table, a pension of so many crowns, according to the liberality and means of the chief, and a charge upon some priory, abbey, or other ecclesiastical endowment. When the chief ceased to laugh, or ceased to breathe, the pension would go, but the benefice remained.

If the nobles thought it creditable thus to make use of a scholar, the scholars themselves thought it extremely honourable to enact the part of the courtly buffoon. Saint Amant, we have seen, was "protected" by one great man after another. But he was a dependant of quite a different order, being ever a gentleman, a soldier, possessed of family pride, of self-respect. The parasites are of the gown, not of the sword. They are lower in social rank, they have no idea of the dignity of man, they are of inferior genius, and save that their influence, political as well as social, was in a few cases quite out of proportion to their abilities, hardly deserve a notice at all. There are two of them all, however, who stand out from the rest, both men of importance in their own day, both privileged buffoons, both representative men of their order, both so far snatched by the historian from oblivion as to present a forcible example of the virtues, the nobility, the elevation of character, generated by a life of flatteries and dependence. One of them was the privileged buffoon of the Duke de Richelieu; the other, a much smaller creature, of the little humpback Armand de Bourbon, Prince de Conti, and brother of the great Condé.

Let us begin with the latter as the less important.

His name was Jean-François Sarasin, and he was the son of a certain treasurer of finance, born at Caen in the year 1604. Studies finished and parents dead, he turned his property, worth 30,000 livres, into cash, and removed to Paris. He was introduced by Angélique Paulet to Madame de Rambouillet, and being an extremely clever, amusing young fellow, was made a good deal of in the circles where Voiture and Benserade already reigned. Here, too, he met Anne de Bourbon, afterwards Duchess of Longueville, then the most rest-

less, the most ambitious, the most clever woman of her time. Among the other friends of the period was Ménage, at whose Saturdays he was a constant attendant, Charleval, Pellisson, and Scudéri, both the vainglorious George and his sister. At the outset Sarasin proposed to himself the life of a man of letters, coupled with such pleasures as Paris only can afford. He began by a "Dissertation on Chess," a "History of the Siege of Dunkirk," that of the "Conspiracy of Valstein," a bundle of Latin verses, and such-like small matters, equal in bulk, probably, to the life-work of one of these degenerate times, but nothing in the eyes of such producers of folios as the scholars of his time.

Scholarship alone is not an expensive occupation; but when you combine with letters the amusements of a man about town, a capital of 30,000 livres is apt to melt with astonishing rapidity. This was exactly the case with Sarasin. He found himself one day without a penny.

By this time, however, he had made friends. One of these, M. de Chavigny, knowing the man's genius, persuaded him to go to Rome, and see what he could get from Pope Urban VIII., always ready to welcome French men of letters. He further lent Sarasin 4,000 francs to pay his expenses. The poet took the money, but instead of going to Rome with it, spent it with a "lady of the Rue Quincampoix," turning up again when it was all gone.

Some men get very early in life a fatal reputation for irresponsibility. What in others is dishonesty, treachery, falsehood, is in them proof of a sweet, innocent, childlike character, which only sins because it knows not the world. That Sarasin was false, dishonest, treacherous, never seems to have struck his friends as worthy their

condemnation. It was all part of the joke, part of Sarasin's character. So, when he appropriated the 4,000 francs everybody laughed, including M. de Chavigny, and said it was capital, just like Sarasin, exactly what he might have been expected to do.

He then, with that ostentation of self-interest which marks his type, married for money. Finding that his wife gave him none, he first neglected, and finally left her, making epigrams upon her age, her ugliness, her bad temper, and her miserly habits. Probably the poor woman wished only to keep her house together and herself from ruin; perhaps her temper had its provocations; perhaps she was not so ugly as her husband represented her. Anyhow Madame Sarasin languished and scolded at home, while her husband enjoyed himself in the great world, being now a *habitué* of the court of the Princess de Bourbon, mother of Condé, Conti, and the Duchess de Longueville. The fêtes of Chantilly and the society of all these lords and ladies had for Sarasin a charm which no domestic felicity could compete with. It was at Chantilly that he read his one good poem, the "Pompe Funèbre de Voiture." It was here, too, that he read his famous Sonnet on Eve. This really does deserve being rescued from oblivion. I leave it in French, because it would inevitably spoil by any translation of mine:—

Lorsqu'Adam vit cette jeune beauté,
Faite pour lui d'une main immortelle,
S'il l'aima fort, elle, de son côté,
(Dont bien nous prit) ne lui fut point cruelle.
Cher Charleval, alors en vérité
Je crois qu'il fut une femme fidèle.
Mais comme quoi ne l'aurait-elle été ?
Elle n'avait qu'un seul homme avec elle.

Or en cela nous nous trompons tous deux;
Car, bien qu'Adam fut jeune et vigoureux,

Bien fait de corps et d'esprit agréable,
Elle aima mieux, pour s'en faire conter,
Prêter l'oreille aux fleurettes du Diable,
Que d'être femme et ne pas coqueter.

It was also to please Madame de Longueville that he entered into the famous "Job" controversy, and wrote a "Glose" of fourteen verses, every one of which ends with one of the lines of the sonnet.

He was already, though this was a talent not yet fully cultivated, a mimic of some reputation. "Preach like a Cordelier," Madame de Longueville would order him. Then would he fold his hands and preach like a Cordelier. "Now like a Capuchin." And then like a Capuchin.

We read no more of historical dissertations, or Latin poems. Quite another style of literature was demanded at Chantilly, and Sarasin was engaged in such courtly erotics as the following:—

Tircis, tell me why your lovers
All alike in wooing are?
Weeping, sighing,
Sobbing, crying,
Love-locks tearing,
And despairing.
Do they think that women care
For a man who can't be gay,
When the Loves, that children are,
Nothing do but laugh all day?

Or this, which is lighter still:—

To call her an angel—
Your Phillis—
I must say, my friend,
Very ill is.
New comparisons seek
Till you've got one;
For angels I know
And she 's not one.

I own she is graceful,
Your Phillis,
But no more divine
Than the lilies:
These extravagant praises,
Get free of them,
For angels I know;
Know three of them.

It was a pleasant time, this of Chantilly, before the Fronde came and all the circle was broken up. With the Fronde began, not so much the evil days of Sarasin, as the days of his real degradation. Hitherto, he had been a favourite, a court poet, an amateur actor, but always in a position which allowed him self-respect. Henceforth he is to be a professional buffoon, a secret spy, and a traitor. For he entered into the service of Armand de Bourbon, Prince of Conti, nominally as his secretary, actually as his amuser. The prince was a hunchback, with an inordinate ambition to be thought a general; he was also a libertine who had periodical fits of repentance and morose piety. On such occasions he and the secretaries would spend whole days at church services, the secretaries, openly very devout, winking at each other behind his back, anxious only that the mood should pass. He was also jealous, suspicious, and irritable. Not the best sort of prince to get on with, and Sarasin had need of all his tact and power of comedy to *ménager* his man.

Part of the life of Sarasin belongs now to the history of France. For it was he who secretly negotiated with Mazarin about the hand of his niece for the prince; he it was who stood between the prince and Madame de Longueville; he it was who told all the lies, betrayed one trust after another; he it was who endeavoured to rule the Prince through his mistresses. Once or twice

he got found out. A letter which he had written to Mazarin beginning, "This little hunchback who calls himself a general," was intercepted and brought to the prince, who naturally enough found the commencement ungrateful; Sarasin was ordered from his presence, but a few days afterwards he came back again, and was reinstated in favour. On another occasion, the Prince finding his affairs in the greatest disorder, looked everywhere for help, even asking his own servants to advance him money. Sarasin declared, smiting his breast, that all he had in the world was the prince's, but that unfortunately he had not a sou. Shortly after, the prince found out that he had made a little purse of 20,000 livres which he kept back and said nothing about. There was, as might be expected, more unpleasantness about this.

The end of this man was worthy of his life. He was poisoned by an offended husband at the age of forty-three. The prince, his master, was for an hour or two profoundly afflicted, being relieved from his grief by a troop of comedians who played before him in the evening. One man only mourned for him; Pellisson the plain, Pellisson the faithful, made a pilgrimage to Pezenas and wept over his grave. Pellisson was a Protestant, but thinking it well to lose no possible chances in favour of his friend, he paid money for masses to be said for the rest of his soul. It would certainly seem as if the soul of Sarasin wanted every little help that his friends could afford.

But we soar to a higher flight, and turn to contemplate and admire one of the greatest men that his generation saw. Great in his buffooneries, great in his flatteries, great in his vices, he was, perhaps, greater

than all in his utter and absolute freedom from any single one of those qualities which ordinarily go to make a man respected. Their absence it is which calls for the world's admiration in François le Metel de Boisrobert.

He was a churchman, with no belief; he owned the finest wit in the world and used it all for buffoonery; he was a profligate stained with every vice of his time —a much worse time, on the whole, than our own; he was a gambler and a drunkard; he was as full of tricks as Panurge; he was as worthless as any habitual criminal; he had not common honesty; he had no scruples of honour, conscience, or principle. If he had any good quality at all it was in a sentimental leaning towards generosity, for like most luxurious men he did not like the sight of distress, which annoyed his sense of ease. And he had one great gift; he was not only the best mimic of the time, but he was a fine and finished actor. Added to this, he had an unlimited supply of good spirits, a resolution always to accept the situation and make the best of it, and a power of wit and repartee which would make the fortune of a modern novelist. His function in life, to make people laugh; his ambition, to go on getting plenty to eat and drink; his dread, that he might find the supplies run short. It is not good to be a buffoon; few positions in life are more incompatible with dignity than those of clown and pantaloon; but it is good to have buffoons. Voltaire says:—

> Tous les gens gais ont le don précieux
> De mettre en bon train tous les gens sérieux.

Boisrobert was born at Caen in Normandy in the year 1592, his father having been a *procureur*, and his mother a woman of some pretensions to nobility, so that, as he

tells us, there were conjugal squabbles on the inferiority of the husband's position. His father brought him up to the bar; he was called, and had begun to plead, when in 1616, then only twenty-four years of age, he suddenly gave up the profession and went to Paris. The reason of this abrupt ending to his professional career was some scandal connected with a young person and two babies. The barrister was interrupted in the midst of an eloquent harangue in the courts by the appearance of the lady, and her loudly-expressed opinions as to his conduct; and as, though silenced once, she returned again to the attack, the scandal was too great to be endured, and he fled. Scandal, however, though not about this misadventure, ran after him, and never left him so long as he breathed these upper airs.

In Paris, and no longer pleading before the courts, he could reckon on being safe from this persecutor at least, and possibly, being still very young, he was able actually to form good resolutions for the future. It is charitable to suppose so, though the good resolutions met the fate that generally attends these children of sorrow. He managed to get introduced at court and among the great nobles, then an exceedingly easy matter, provided one had certain credentials of scholarship, good spirits, and poetry. Presently, however, there stared him in the face the difficulty of paying his way. First of all, and as a stop-gap, he hit upon a device which was as novel as it was ingenious. He went about among his patrons asking not for money, but for books with which to complete his library. These were freely given, and as fast as he got them he sold them, clearing, as we are told, five or six thousand francs by the transaction. "The only life possible for a poet," says the author of the "Roman Bourgeois," "is to haunt

the court, the *ruelles*, and the academies; to send letters to all the great men, to compose verses for the maids of honour, and to write ballets." This was exactly Boisrobert's opinion. He began by haunting the court and writing verses for the ladies, and then went on to write the libretto for the court ballets.

The ballet, originally an Italian invention, was then an entertainment in great vogue among great people, and offered opportunities for display of dancing, singing, and little gallantries. It consisted of five acts, each containing therein six, nine, or even twelve entrées, every entrée carrying on the action with a dance and a song. In 1623, Boisrobert, with Théophile and two or three others as *collaborateurs*, brought out his first ballet. Before this he had been attached to the court of Marie de Médicis, at Blois, for whom he engaged to write a translation of the "Pastor Fido."

In 1625 he went to England with Madame de Chevreuse on the occasion of the marriage of Henrietta with Charles the First. Here he made an enemy in the person of Lord Holland, first by calling the climate of England barbarous, which, if it had been this year 1872-73, might have been pardoned by the greatest patriot; and, secondly, through a trick of Madame de Chevreuse, who hid the king and Lord Holland behind the tapestry, and then made Boisrobert mimic the latter, which he did only too well.

Four or five years later he made the greatest mistake that a man can possibly commit: for he took orders, being wholly unfit for the work. He got preferment, it is true, but he paid the penalty through life of a false position; and his ecclesiastical garb sat upon him about as easily and as comfortably as that leaden cowl which adorns certain souls in Dante's Hell. He was

ordained by the Pope, who laid hands upon him suddenly, and without that inquiry into his morals which is thought proper in the Anglican Church; for from the very first moment of receiving the tonsure to his death, Boisrobert was a disgrace to his order.

But the Pope was a man of letters, and fallible on the literary side. When, three years later, the young priest obtained a canonry at Rouen, his friends exhorted him to observe a certain amount of decorum, pointing out the necessity of outward seeming in a beneficed ecclesiastic; he listened, laughed, and did not reform, going to Rouen as seldom as he possibly could, cursing the day when he left Paris, and every day that he was absent. He managed to scandalize his chapter while down there, by having the audacity to promise a young lady who was ill one day that the cathedral bells should be silent. Now of all days in the year it was that of the Nativity of the Virgin, and you might just as well ask the Dean of Westminster to silence his bells on Christmas Day, because on that day they were accustomed and privileged to make a great deal more noise than usual. The indignant chapter ordered every available bell to be set ringing all day long, and then laid an interdict on the offender. Boisrobert got the interdict removed, and explained to the young lady that his request had failed because the chapter were dazzled by the charms of her rival.

Another of his amusements at Rouen was to get up theatricals in the form of mysteries. On one occasion, after arranging his piece, the "Death of Abel," and casting his characters, a lady offered to pay all the expenses if her son might act. To get all the expenses paid was a great thing; to find a character for the aspirant was impossible. Boisrobert rose to the occasion. He

invented a new part, dressed the boy in red velvet, called him the *Blood of Abel*, and had him rolled up and down the stage, bawling "Vengeance!". But these little distractions were not enough to soothe the melancholy of his exile. He was as sad as if Rouen had been Tomi, and Normandy Pontus; wrote letters to his friends, begging them to bear in mind that he only stayed away from Paris for the money, only said mass for the fees, and continually regretted the society he had left behind. There came at last an opportunity of which he gladly availed himself, of remaining altogether in Paris. Richelieu, who already entertained Bautru as privileged jester, was ready to engage, so to speak, another; just as we sometimes see two clowns on the stage in a pantomime. Boisrobert, with gifts and graces far superior to those of Bautru, offered himself. Thenceforth he was to the great minister a necessary of existence. Richelieu loaded him with offices and emoluments; gave him the abbey of Châtillon-sur-Seine, the priory of Ferté-sur-Aube, and several other benefices; named him grand chaplain to the king, and gave him letters of nobility for his father.

Here, now, is an excellent opportunity for the indignation of a satirist. "See," says a Juvenal, "how Corneille is left to starve while Boisrobert gets fat; a Homer begs his way while a buffoon eats and drinks of the best, and is clothed in purple. Is it, then, better to be a mimic than to be a poet?" It certainly is; in every age of the world's history it has paid to make people laugh; he stands best with his publisher who writes things that amuse; and a great comedian can command his own terms. For myself, not being an indignant satirist, I entirely sympathize with the world. It is so rare, this amusing

faculty, so seldom that one gets the enormous enjoyment of an uncontrolled and uncontrollable laugh, that I refuse to point the finger of scorn at Richelieu. I envy him the power of retaining Boisrobert, and I should like, if I were a cardinal, to have at my table every day a man who would be always witty, always amusing, always clever, and always scholarly. To be sure, the minister might have done something more for the great Corneille; but it must have been weary, weary work, listening to those tragedies. Find me, if you can, any living person who habitually reads Racine or Corneille for pleasure.

Boisrobert's great faculty was his dramatic way of telling a story. Those with which he amused the cardinal are all lost, except one preserved for us by Tallemant des Réaux. It is of a wicked trick perpetrated on Mademoiselle de Gournay, the adopted daughter of Montaigne, and the author of the "Ombre." She was old and unmarried; poor, too; of extremely sensitive literary nerves, and lived her long life in a vapour-bath of admiration and respect for the great Montaigne. She was also a great stickler for the language of the sixteenth century, against the innovations proposed by Malherbe, Colombay, and their school.

The chevaliers De Bueil and Yvrande learning that the poet Racan was going to pay a visit of ceremony to this lady, conceived the brilliant idea of personating him, one after the other, on the day of his visit. De Bueil, actually a cousin of Racan, was the first to call. Mlle. de Gournay was making verses. He introduced himself as M. Racan, made her a thousand compliments, and presently went away, leaving her in a rapture at such unaccustomed flattery. Directly he was well out of the house, Yvrande, who found the door

half open, stepped in unceremoniously. She was talking over her late visitor to her companion, Mlle. Jamyn.

"I enter without knocking, mademoiselle, but the illustrious Mlle. de Gournay must not be treated as a common person."

"That is a very pretty compliment," she answered. "Jamyn, my tablets to put it down. And turn out the cat, while I talk to this gentleman."

"I have come to thank you," went on the chevalier, "for the honour you have done me in sending me your book."

"My book, monsieur? I have not sent you one, but I certainly should have done so. Jamyn, a copy of the 'Ombre,' for monsieur."

"But I have one, mademoiselle. To prove it let me remind you of such and such a passage, in such a chapter."

Then he informed her that in return he had brought her some of his own verses. She took them and read. "This is very good, Jamyn," she said. "Jamyn, I must tell you, monsieur, is a daughter of Amadis Jamyn, page to Ronsard, which connects us with the past. This is very good. Here, perhaps, you Malherbize; here you imitate Colombay—but it is all very good, very good indeed. May I only ask your name?"

"My name, mademoiselle, is Racan."

"Ah! you are laughing at me?"

"Laugh at you? laugh at Mlle. de Gournay, the daughter by adoption of the great Montaigne, that illustrious lady of whom Lipsius himself said, 'Videamus quid sit paritura ista virgo?'"

"Very well—it is all very well," she replied, "but the gentleman who just left me told me he was M. Racan. Youth will laugh at age; I am glad, however,

to have met two such handsome and agreeable gentlemen."

So, with more compliments, they parted.

A moment afterwards, Racan himself came up the stairs. He was neither handsome nor agreeable. Moreover he was asthmatic, and was out of breath with the effort of getting up the stairs, so that he came in puffing and panting.

"Mademoiselle," he began, "excuse my taking a chair." He had an impediment in his speech, too; stammered, and was always in difficulty over some of the more arduous consonants, such as *s* and *r*.

"Mademoiselle," he went on, "I will tell you in a quarter of an hour or so, why I come to see you . . . when I get my breath. Why the devil do you live so high up? Phew—those stairs. Mademoiselle, I am obliged to you for the copy of your book."

"Jamyn," said the lady, outraged by the puffing bard's allusion to her poverty, "disabuse this gentleman. I have given no copies except to M. Malherbe and M. Racan."

"Racan . . Racan . . C'est moi."

"Jamyn, be good enough to attend. This is a very pretty story, is it not? At least the other two were gentlemen. This fellow is a mere buffoon."

"Mademoiselle, I am Racan himself."

"I don't care who you are," she cried in a rage, "you are the greatest fool of the three."

He took his own book of poems and offered to recite them by heart. But she raged all the more, and began to screech and cry "Thieves!" till Racan slipped away as fast as he could.

Next day, she learned the real truth, and of course wrote a letter of abject apology.

Boisrobert made a little play out of it, which he used to act all by himself, representing them each in turn, the poor old lady, her faithful Jamyn, the sympathy of the cat, and the three Racans. He played it before Racan himself, who laughed till the tears ran down his face, crying, "It's all true . . . . it's all true."

Poor Mademoiselle de Gournay! But she lost nothing by the joke, because Boisrobert got a pension from the cardinal for her, another for the faithful Jamyn, and another for the cat.

He used his influence with the cardinal for a good many people; for Mairet, who had done him all the mischief he could; for Gombaut, who had called his verses detestable; for all who asked him, except his own brothers and nephews, who came crowding about the great man of the family, pestering for appointments:—

> S'ils étaient morts, je vivrais trop heureux,
> Car je n'ai peine au monde que par eux.

As for his literary work at this time, it consisted in writing epistles in verse, not so good as those of Saint Amant, and in helping Richelieu with his very bad plays. But then it is not as a great writer that we may remember Boisrobert. It was he who first suggested the formation of the French Academy.[1] It grew out of a réunion held weekly, of certain second-rate poets, at the

[1] It was not, after all, the first French Academy. In 1570 Charles IX. granted letters patent to an Academy of poets and scholars which used to meet in the house of Antoine de Baïf. The members had the privilege of sitting in the presence of the king. After the death of Charles, Henry III. made out new letters patent, writing them himself, and making his mother and the great lords and ladies of the court sign them. Then the Academy met twice a week at court, holding discussions, with music. Among the members were Ronsard, Amadis Jamyn, Guy du Faur de Pibrac, Philippe Desportes, and Agrippa d'Aubigné.

house of Boisrobert's friend Conrart. Would you like to hear something of the very first Academicians? They consisted of Conrart, Godeau, Gombaut, Giry, Habert, Cerisy, Malleville, and Serisay.

Of these the best-known now is Conrart, the first perpetual secretary of the newly-born Academy. He held the office for more than forty years, living a peaceful quiet life, now and then producing some little work of no great merit, but carefully executed, and was always a friend of everybody. Godeau, a better poet and scholar than Conrart, was his cousin. He was very small and very ugly, and so great a favourite at the Hôtel-de Rambouillet that they called him *le nain de la princesse Julie*. He became a bishop, and an exemplary bishop. As for his books they were many, but probably did not cause so much improvement to the human race as the example of his godly life.

Gombaut, the third on our list, was also a very respectable poet, and a highly respectable member of society. He lived to be nearly a hundred years of age, wrote a goodly quantity of verse, once very popular, and had the misfortune of seeing himself forgotten long before he died. The best thing recorded of Gombaut is, that once when Cardinal Richelieu pointed to a passage in his verses saying, "There are some things here that I do not understand," the poet replied simply, "That is not my fault." As we have seen, Boisrobert helped him to a pension.

Giry, of whom also nothing but praise must be written, was a lawyer of great repute who had also literary proclivities. He published certain translations and had the great credit of writing better French than any living person.

Habert, not François Habert, the poor poet of the six-

teenth century, was soldier as well as poet. He fought more than he wrote; that is to say, his poetry is but one poem, and his sieges were many. He was killed at the siege of Emmerdick, in Hainault, being then commissary of artillery. He was one of those charged with the formation of the constitution of the New Academy.

Cerisy, Habert de Cerisy, was his younger brother, also a poet and a soldier. Malleville, of whom Boileau writes—

> A peine dans Gombauld, Maynard, ou Malleville
> En peut-on admirer deux ou trois entre mille—

gave up his life to the manufacture of sonnets. It was an innocent occupation, doing no harm to anybody, and as we are not now, whatever his contemporaries were, obliged to read his poems, let us say no hard things about him. Serisay, to complete the list of this learned society, was also a poet, no doubt extremely good, could we find time to read him. He was also a great pedant in language, wanting to proscribe all sorts of familiar locutions, such as *d'autant*, *toutefois*, *encore*, and others, so that we wonder what the French language would have been had he been allowed to work his wicked will upon it. Ménage wrote of him:—

> Bref, ce délicat Serisay
> Eust chaque mot féminisé,
> Sans respect ny d'analogie,
> Ny d'aulcune étymologie.

This was the first circle; one of commonplace and respectable mediocrities, prigs and pedants, with literary ambitions and aspiring airs, disposed to form a mutual admiration society. Furet was the first stranger introduced into the little band of poets. He read there his "Honnête Homme," and was immediately elected a member. Then came Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin, the first

chancellor of the Academy, and one of the most singular characters of the time, but of limited genius. On the foundation of the society, in 1634, a few more were admitted, but chiefly for their social positions, and out of deference to the cardinal.

Such were the first members of the French Academy. Richelieu's purpose in founding it seems clear. It was not to purify, or even to foster, literature. It was to bring literature within court influence; to counteract the dangers of the press; to establish a body of men, the ablest writers of their time, who should be bound by self-interest to support the existing order. More could not be expected of a minister who preferred his own comedies to those of Corneille; and as for the men who were the first Academicians, so long as they were respectable it was all he cared for. The real genius of the time was not in the Academy at all. It was at the Hôtel de Rambouillet, the rival establishment; and it was not till many years afterwards, after Boileau, La Fontaine, and Racine had dignified the name of Academician, that the real influence of the Academy began. We know the history of the "forty-first chair;" how great men have been systematically kept out and small men admitted; but all deductions made, it is and always has been the greatest honour that a man of letters can achieve to be elected one of the Forty. The outsiders have avenged their defeat by countless epigrams, but they would nevertheless all like to be admitted. And the credit of establishing the French Academy belongs to the man who first suggested it—the buffoon Boisrobert. He himself was proud of the act:—

Je suis abbé mitré:
Plus grands rimeurs ont plus mal rencontré;
Et j'eus encor fortune assez amie
Quand je formai l'illustre Académie.

He exercised his good-nature at the cost of the Academy's reputation by getting in men who had no claim at all to literary distinction. He called them "les enfants de la pitié de Boisrobert." Furetière called them the *jetonniers*, meaning that they only attended the séances to draw their share of the forty livres which were granted for each meeting. There is no doubt that some of them used to waste the time of the members in little idle discussions, in order to prolong the business, and so get more meetings.

Let us get back to our abbé. It is related of him that on one occasion—the only one on record—he was touched with a little repentance at his dissolute ways. He went, as the person most likely to sympathize with him, to Ninon de l'Enclos. "Ma divine," he said, "I shall go and stay for three weeks with the Jesuit fathers. That will stop the tongues of people. I shall stay there just three weeks, and then come away quietly; they will think I am still there. The only thing that troubles me is their dinners. . . . I cannot quite make up my mind."

The next day he called again. "I have thought it over," he said. "I shall go for three days; that will produce quite as good an effect as three weeks."

The day after he appeared again. "Ma divine, it is all settled. I thought it was best to go to the Jesuits. I called them together and pronounced my apology. We are the best friends in the world. As I went away a young brother caught me by the cassock, and said, 'Monsieur, come and see us sometimes.' There is nobody in the world that pleases the fathers more than you.'" The rascal pleased everybody, with his jovial ways, his jokes, his mimicry, and fun.

The best actor of his time, undoubtedly, was Mon-

dori, in spite of a tendency to mouth his part. No one could "pousser une passion," as it was called, so well as Mondori. No one could so easily draw the tears of his audience. His voice was soft and sweet; his gesture full of fire and animation, while he seemed himself possessed by every passion which he pourtrayed. His force and vigour brought him to a premature end, for while acting the part of Herod in the tragedy of "Mariamne," he fell into a fit of apoplexy, and only recovered to find one side of his body partly paralyzed.

Boisrobert declared, when on one occasion Mondori threw the cardinal into tears, that he could act as well. He declaimed the same piece before the actor himself and the cardinal, and with the same success. Even Mondori acknowledged that in Boisrobert he had found an equal.

But success brings with it the stings of envy, and Boisrobert was henceforth known as the Abbé Mondori. He was making an excuse once for not keeping an appointment. "They carried me off," he said, "at the very door of the theatre." "What!" his friend returned, "at your own cathedral?"

He carried his familiarity with the great cardinal at last to a point which led to his disgrace. It was on the occasion of the first representation of the "Mirame" which was put on the stage at Richelieu's own expense. The king, the Duke of Orleans, and all the court were present. Boisrobert actually had the audacity to bring in a couple of young ladies partly connected with the theatrical profession, and of character not at all dubious. The king spoke of it to the cardinal, who was furious, and ordered Boisrobert to retire to his ecclesiastical duties. The French Academy interceded for him, but the cardinal kept him in exile for some time. The meet-

ing of the two, when the minister recalled the buffoon, was affecting; for when Richelieu burst into tears on seeing his favourite again, Boisrobert, at this critical moment, could not force a single tear. What was to be done? Only one thing. He fell back in a pretended fit, as if stifled with suppressed emotion. They carried him away and bled him, and presently the desired tears came, and his credit for sensibility was re-established. But Richelieu died immediately after the reconciliation, and the Abbé Mondori found himself, at fifty years of age, free to laugh or not as he pleased, and well provided with good things in the shape of benefices. He lost, however, the power which had formerly given him dignity, and was reduced to the position of a simple ecclesiastic about town, an *abbé de la cour*. Then he writes to Mazarin and complains of his fall from the lofty position of actual to that of would-be favourite. "You ought to pity me," he says, "you who have seen me appear in the cabinet of a great and puissant master, now reduced to look about for a place among those who try to catch your eye. And all in vain, for you ever pass elsewhere."

Was it then agreeable, this position of jester, lackey, humble friend to a minister? Does a time come when the jingle of the golden fetters is a sweet and refreshing sound to a great man's slave?

He went on telling stories, and saying good things. Thus the Prince de Conti one day called out to him at the theatre, when they were acting a piece of his, "Boisrobert, it is a wretched piece." "Monseigneur," he replied, "you overwhelm me by these praises in my presence."

He wrote verses at the time of the troubles against the Frondeurs. The Coadjutor, of course the leading

spirit of the Fronde, heard of them, and sent for him. "Recite me your verses, Boisrobert," he said. "With the greatest pleasure," replied the abbé; but, as if struck with a sudden thought, went to the window, opened it, and looked down. "Ma foy! monseigneur, I shall do nothing of the sort. Your window is much too high."

One day, again, Madame d'Aiguillon begun to abuse him for his notorious evil life. "They say everywhere, Boisrobert, that you are an Atheist." "Madame, they will say anything. They say everywhere that you ——" "Boisrobert!" "Madame, I assure you that I have never believed them."

To stop some of the scandals about him the authorities ordered him to perform mass sometimes, and it was then an edifying thing for the fashionable world to go to church on these occasions and actually see him doing it. "Look at him," the ladies whispered, "his chasuble is made out of Ninon's petticoat." And once when talking of genealogies and ancient names, he said that, his name being Metel, he had a perfect right to call himself Metellus. "So," said some one, "that it is not Metellus Pius."

When he was between sixty and seventy, the court exiled him from his beloved Paris, making as an excuse a certain volley of oaths that he had discharged after a heavy night of play. For, among other little weaknesses, M. Boisrobert was a gambler. They had him back after a while, and the old life went on again. He published his epistles in verse, and got praise, at least. Ménage, the scholar, wrote:—

Sermones patrio scripsit sermone Metellus,
Parcere vult famæ dum, Venusine, tuæ.

Enough to make the Venusian bard turn in his grave. But the conviction, deliberately formed and openly expressed, of the writers of that age, was that posterity for all time would be entirely occupied in the study of their works and the distribution of their respective honours. It was a creed that got good work out of them all, because conceit seldom did one harm. And see, after two hundred years, during which no Englishman, at least, has spoken of this most disreputable old sinner and poet, I am occupying twenty pages of this volume in telling you his history.

A life with no gravity, no principle, no self-respect, no high aims, no art, no dignity, could have but one kind of age, the most wretched and contemptible spectacle of an old man whose craving is still for the vices and pleasures of his youth. His friends continued to be amused with him to the end. No man ever told more stories, or, single-handed, ever gave rise to so many. No man lived more undoubtedly a life of pure selfish animal enjoyment and mirth. When he died a new era was commencing. It was in 1662. Mazarin was dead. Louis had begun really to reign. Boileau had begun to write. Art, method, decorum, good taste, manners, decency, were to have their turn; and it was all over with poets like St. Amant, Benserade, Voiture, Sarasin, and Boisrobert. The wits and witlings of the old school were put up on the shelves, written though they were in the vernacular, "so as to spare the fame of the Venusian poet," not to be pulled down again for two hundred years.

The death of Boisrobert was not so edifying as he wished it to be. He was, of course, repentant, and after sending for his confessor, he began in the most pro-

mising manner. "Do not," he said to his friends, "think of Boisrobert living, but of Boisrobert dying."

This was very good, so far, and quite what might be hoped. "God," observed his confessor, "has pardoned greater sinners than you."

Old Boisrobert's eyes began to twinkle again.

"He has," he said, "much greater sinners. The Abbé de Villarceaux, for instance"—he had just lost money at play to this ecclesiastic—"is doubtless a greater sinner than I, but I hope God will pardon him too."

One of the ladies at his bedside said to him, "Monsieur l'abbé, contrition is a great virtue."

"It is, madame," he replied; "I wish it you with all my heart."

And his last words were, "I should be content to be on as good terms with our Lord as I have been with Cardinal Richelieu."

Was ever deathbed scene so *bizarre?* We see the actor endeavouring to go out of the world as he ought. He has no conscience, because it is dead long since; he has no faith, no belief, no hope, no fear; even at the last moment he cannot abandon his old habits of speech and thought. He makes a repartee, leaves behind a mischievous *mot* against the man who has won his money, gives a sigh for the good old days, takes the crucifix in his hands, and expires.

His life is an anticipation of that of hundreds of men as bad as himself, perhaps worse, because at least they had no genius, and said no good things, who flourished in the eighteenth century as *abbés de la cour*—priests about town, men with whom Atheism was religion and profligacy the rule of life.

This is Loret's epitaph:—

Ci-gît un monsieur de chapitre,
Ci-gît un abbé portant mitre,
Ci-gît un courtisan expert,
Ci-gît le fameux Boisrobert.
Ci-gît un homme académique,
Ci-gît un poëte comique;
Et toutefois ce monument
N'enferme qu'un corps seulement.

Chapter XII.

PAUL SCARRON.

He is as disproportioned in his manners
As in his shape.—*Tempest.*

BY common consent, when a new *genre* in literature or art springs up, we call the most eminent among the early masters in the style its founder. We do not mean to imply that he invented it, or that he perfected it, but that he found it in a rudimentary and chaotic state, and left it so formed that its future was only a matter of natural development. In this sense the founder of modern burlesque is indubitably Scarron. He neither invented the name nor the thing. As for the name, it was taken by Sarasin from the Italian, and replaced the older word *grotesque;* and for the thing, there are plenty of traces of burlesque in the literature of his own country before his time; in the Fabliaux, which we are quite sure Scarron never heard of; in Rabelais; in the story-tellers of the Renaissance; and in the "Satyre Ménippée." These were full to overflowing of that spirit of mirth, mockery, and incredulity, of which burlesque was naturally the offspring. The possibility of burlesque, indeed—its δύναμις—has always been latent. It has

broken out from time to time, as occasion served; not generally in times of faith and acquiescence, but in those of doubt and struggle; when men's old idols were passing away, and their respect for ancient things was dying; or, even more, when a generation of mighty struggles and lofty hopes has perished, leaving a legacy of hopes disappointed and struggles fruitless.

The earliest writer of burlesque would be, I suppose, Aristophanes; the next, of those whose works are preserved, Lucian. Then burlesque sleeps. Pulci half awakens it in his "Morgante Maggiore," which is a kind of burlesque. But it is not till Scarron that it really wakes again: for the time, as well as the man, were wanting. Both came—the time in the later years of King Louis XIII., and the man in the person of Paul Scarron.

Hardly any period, for those who take the trouble and have the leisure to read the memoirs extant, can be so fully and familiarly known, so clearly understood, as this. The volumes of Tallemant des Réaux have given us at least all the ill-natured things that could be said about every man and every woman who figured in the Parisian circles. Besides his anecdotes, we have the letters of some of them; even their works are not yet quite forgotten, although they were contemptuously dismissed by Boileau to the limbo of oblivion. We *know* these men, as they talked, and wrote, and squabbled. We can see them from the outside—can laugh at their follies and their eagerness over trifles, sympathize with their difficulties, and forgive their vanity.

It was very far from being a healthy time for France. As for what we call "earnestness," there was none. The country was in a wretched condition; affairs of

state were left to the great cardinal; the monarchy was disgraced by a king who was too feeble to rule alone, and who hated the man who kept him on the throne. The old enthusiasms were dead; the early fire of zeal was dying out in the Huguenots; hatred of schism was well-nigh extinguished with the Catholics; and men were tired, and even ashamed, of the ancient ardour with which they had plunged into classical learning. Time was when they had looked for the regeneration of the world from Plato. A hundred years before, Rabelais, Erasmus, Dolet, Étienne, and the glorious race of the early scholars, looked forward, eager with hope, expecting that learning would soften all men's hearts. But a century of scholarship had left the world very much where it was before. Here was a Europe steeped in Plato, versed in Greek and Latin, and yet worse than at any previous time; its literature —in France at least—fouler, its manners coarser, its morals looser; its leaders seeming baser and more wicked. No wonder that men, disappointed and wearied, looked no longer for things noble, or for things great, and that they yawned in the face of their old idols; for it was that dull dead time between two schools of thought, when, if anyone mock at things once thought great and heroic, all men mock with him. This was what Scarron did. In place of yawning with the rest, he took down the chief of the old idols, Virgil, and set his *troupe* of gods and heroes on the modern stage, making them talk the language of the market-place and the barracks; and all the world, bursting into a Gargantuan roar of laughter, rushed to imitate their leader, and everybody wrote burlesque. The function—it is, I own, a limited one—of burlesque is to strip from objects of former admiration and worship

their supposed heroic properties; to show them actuated by the commonest motives, enunciating the most vulgar sentiments, and parading under the garb of heroes the ideas and language of lackeys. Burlesque makes a Philistine of him who was once believed to be a prophet, a Bobadil of the soldier, a kitchen drab of the queen; it turns the solemn destinies of the gods into the caprices of a vestry, and it makes of the great Thunderer himself, ὁ ὑψιβρεμέτης, a mere *épicier*. In burlesque there is no room for anything lofty, anything pure; there is no enthusiasm, no faith, no hope. Of all forms of mockery devised by the human wit, there is none more effective than this, which out of the thousand various impulses which prompt men to action takes uniformly the basest, the lowest, and the most interested. Thus Aristophanes puts Bacchus on the stage, pretending to be Hercules, and convicted by his own cowardice; Lucian makes Charon a higgler for his penny fee; Scarron shows us Anchises, borne from the flames of Troy by the devotion of his son, prodding him in the back to make him go faster, and in an agony of terror addressing him alternately as "*mâtin*" and as "*mon cher fils*." Thus, too, Æneas is a Pecksniff and a prig; Dido a queen with the soul of a housemaid.

As is the work, so was the man. It is a commonplace of all who have written about Scarron, to say that his writings are *en rapport* with his life; that as he was a burlesque on humanity, his works are a burlesque on literature. It is only a half truth: the truer way to put it would be that certain works of his have an artistic twist and deformity about them somewhat analogous to the deformity of his body.

Paul Scarron, a Parisian by birth, came into the

world in the year 1610. His father, a man of good family, and a counsellor of the Parliament, possessed a fortune of twenty thousand livres, worth at least four or five thousand sterling in these days. He had three children—Paul, the second, and two daughters. Unfortunately for them, his first wife died, and he married again. The second marriage brought three more children, and Paul very quickly saw that his chances of the inheritance grew daily less, owing to the influence of his mother-in-law. The father incurred the displeasure of Cardinal Richelieu, and was ultimately exiled to Touraine. This, however, was much later on. Then Paul began to make things disagreeable at home by quarrelling with his stepmother, and accusing his father of being unduly influenced by her, to his own prejudice. Possibly he was quite wrong, for at least he was never remarkable for prudence or sobriety of judgment in after-life, and the step-mother may have been a remarkably just and admirable person. As he made the house too hot for both, his father sent him away to a cousin at Charleville, where he remained two or three years, and was then taken back on condition of good behaviour. So Paul came home, making what the school histories call a "hollow peace." In due course he assumed the *petit collet*. The sacred profession served to young men of good family not only as a tolerably sure stepping-stone to fortune, but also as a cloak to disguise any amount of profligacy. It meant very little, as a badge, except that the wearer was quite prepared to do literary work or accept a benefice. Young Scarron, there is every reason to believe, was in the fastest set of his time. He would appear to have had command of money, for we hear of no work being done, or any application for a benefice. Quite

the contrary; his life was that of a pure bird of pleasure—pleasure of the kind chiefly sought after by young gentlemen of Epicurean proclivities. When he was about twenty-four he made a journey to Italy, probably on some pretence of getting good things out of the Pope, like Boisrobert later on. It was a country which had the reputation of being more than usually detrimental to the morals of young travellers; if, at least, the proverb *Inglese Italianato diavolo incarnato* may be applied to others than our own countrymen. Small was the amount of moral baggage that Paul Scarron took with him to Italy; smaller, perhaps, the amount he brought back with him. For four more short years he enacted with far more than ordinary ability the part of the prodigal son; and then came an end, sudden, sharp, retributive, decisive. He was only twenty-eight. He might have reformed and settled down, as so many young fellows do, little the worse for his wild oats. He was clever, he had interest, he had scholarship. His life lay stretched before him fair and clear, when suddenly he was brought up short, and placed for a quarter of a century on a chair of suffering.

There is a ridiculous story told about the cause. It is said that at carnival time he disguised himself, with certain others, as savages; that their appearance in the streets caused such an uproar, that they were obliged to run for their lives, and that Scarron only escaped by swimming across the river. The consequence of this cold bath, taken in February, was the paralysis and twisting of his limbs, of which he could never be cured.

That is the popular account, which is quite false, the real truth being that he trusted himself to the tender mercies of a quack, who, by means of certain noxious

drugs, brought on a complication of diseases worse than those he tried to cure. The strength of his manhood left him; his limbs were bent, his back was arched, so that he resembled nothing so much, he says, as the letter *Z*; and he was laid by the heels a prisoner for life in his arm-chair.

He took a rueful pleasure in describing his own misfortunes. In his epistle to Sarasin he describes himself as

> Un pauvret
> Très maigret,
> Au col tors,
> Dont le corps,
> Tout tortu,
> Tout bossu,
> Suranné,
> Décharné,
> Fut réduit
> Jour et nuit
> A souffrir
> Sans guérir
> Des tourmens
> Véhémens.

He had an engraving drawn for a frontispiece of one of his books, in which he represents himself sitting, twisted, doubled up, hunchbacked, in his arm-chair.

He laughs at his sufferings, but it is a rueful sort of laugh, at best. At times his real misery makes itself felt; and the bodily torture which he endured with the fortitude of Capaneus in Dante's seventh circle was at times too much even for Scarron's courage.

I cannot but think that, lighthearted and buoyant as was his nature, his heart must have been broken when first this dreadful thing fell upon him. Behind all his mask of raillery and fun we can see the bitter pains of disappointment and remorse sometimes convulsing his face. Something more than human would he be if he

had been really able to contemplate, even with resignation, a life spent in an armchair, cut off from ordinary pleasures, with no longer a career, or a hope of distinction, save by the precarious road of letters. Whether it is true or not that clowns in private life are the most melancholy of men, it is certainly true that many men who have written for the amusement of others have been themselves *miserrimi*—most wretched. Swift, Sterne, Smollett, Hood—the first names that occur—were melancholy men, when all the town was laughing at their wit; Scarron was writhing with pain when the whole town was laughing at his. But if we, who can read all his letters, and compare them with his life and works, who can read all the anecdotes told by his friends, think we can detect the cloven foot of sorrow beneath the robe of wit, Care sitting by the cripple, like the skeleton form of Death stalking beside the knight: those who only saw a part of the man, who assisted at his receptions, who laughed at his epigrams, and with their host found fresh amusement from every pang that wrenched his frame, were all, and easily, deceived. To them Scarron was the happiest, lightest-hearted, and gayest of mankind. Life to him was a real joke. The dread of poverty did not weigh him down. No misfortunes affected him. If he lost his pension, he had still his marquisate de Quinet (his publisher). He nearly dies of a cough—he makes an epigram on his escape. He satirizes Mazarin; when the cardinal returns to power he turns round and satirizes himself. His income is too small for him to entertain his friends at dinner or supper: let them bring every man something, so that the feast may be an ἔρανος. He can get no office from the queen: good—let him at least be called the "queen's invalid." His two sisters live with

him; their conduct is not altogether calculated to keep up the family honour; he consoles himself by a *bon-mot.* His house is poor—his furniture shabby—his entertainments meagre; but everybody goes to him. There you will meet the circle of Precisians—they come here to relax—who hover round the throne of Arthenice the intellectual, and try to warm themselves in the cold moonshine of Julia. Ménage is there, scholar and wit; Sarasin, with all the company of buffoons, satirists, and writers of *vers de société;* Tristan l'Hermite, Segrais, Marigny, Boisrobert, George de Scudéri, Gascon pure and simple, great soldier and writer of those everlasting novels which people once read, who prefaced his works with his own portrait, and the boastful legend—

Et poëte et guerrier
Il aura du laurier;

the illustrious Mademoiselle de Scudéri herself, it is said, though one scarcely believes this; Chapelain, friend of Molière and Boileau; Voiture, of the letters and the odes; the great Coadjutor; then, too, Madame de la Sablière, with sometimes Marion de Lorme, most charming of sinners, and Ninon de l'Enclos herself. No doubt, when Ninon and Marion came, La Scudéri kept away. At least, one hopes so. And in that room, what discourse and mad revelling!—what laughing at the only circle in France which still tried to keep up a taste for literature, and forced their own society, at least, to preserve the outward forms of decency! Outward forms were not, one imagines, much regarded at Scarron's receptions.

Before going to Paris, he held for three years the benefice of Mans, the duties being performed by somebody else. During this period he lived in his official residence,

and as no stories are told about him, probably it was in great loneliness and misery. While he was at Mans his father died, and a lawsuit which he instituted against his stepmother about the succession, failed. It was during these years, too, that he began to feel his way in writing, and practised the art of dedications, requests, petitions, and begging-letters, in which he afterwards achieved such distinction. He writes letters asking for everything, from pensions to patties; and he gets everything. Through the kind offices of Madame de Hautefort, he is introduced to the queen, from whom he solicits permission to be called *son malade*. Of course, a pension went with this dignified post. Another introduction to Mazarin procured him a second pension, this time of five hundred crowns. But he was so exasperated by the cardinal's subsequent refusal to allow his "Typhon" to be dedicated to him, that when the Fronde broke out, he joined it, and became the most vehement of all the Frondeurs, and was supposed to have been the author of the "Mazarinade." Mazarin came back. Scarron perceived that his wisdom had been at fault. So he made haste to turn round, addressing a beautiful letter to the cardinal:—

Jule, autrefois l'objet de l'injuste satire.

He also began to write against the Frondeurs:—

Il faut désormais filer doux,
Il faut crier miséricorde.
Frondeurs, vous n'êtes que des fous:
Il faut désormais filer doux.
C'est mauvais présage pour vous
Qu'une fronde n'est qu'une corde.
Il faut désormais filer doux,
Il faut crier miséricorde.

It was all very well, and Mazarin was not the man to bear long malice for a libel; but Scarron never got back that pension, or the one from the queen. Fouquet,

at this juncture of his affairs, gave him one of 1,600 livres, and he began to write with redoubled activity, to maintain the expense of a house which, unless kept always open, would have been dreary indeed to its owner, who could never leave it. As for the money, it came in from his poetry, his plays, his tales, his dedications, and his begging-letters.

The society that met in Scarron's *salon* was of a "mixed" character, as we have seen, and the conversation of the freest. But after five or six years of this life, a salutary reformation was effected. For in 1652 the Baronne de Neuillant, his neighbour, brought to see him her ward, Françoise d'Aubigné, just arrived from America, whither Scarron was projecting a voyage with the hopes of getting cured. He never accomplished this journey, but he was so moved by compassion at the poor girl's forlorn and dependent condition, that he offered to marry her. Life just then looked very dismal to little Françoise; she was seventeen years of age (three years older than the king); her father and mother were both dead; she was so horribly poor that she had not even enough money to find the *dot* necessary to get into a convent. Scarron was struck with her beauty, her *esprit*, her gentleness, and began by writing her letters.

"I always doubted whether the little girl that I saw enter my room six months ago, with a dress too short, and who began to cry—I don't know why—was really as *spirituelle* as she seemed to be. The letter that you have written to Mlle. de Saint-Hermant is so full of cleverness, that I am discontented with my own for not having made her acquainted with the full merit of yours. To tell the truth, I had never believed that in the American isles they cared about the study of *belles-*

lettres, and I am concerned to find out why you have taken as much trouble to conceal your cleverness as most people take to show it. Now that you are found out, you must make no difficulty about writing to me as well as you do to Mlle. de Saint-Hermant. I will do all I can to make my letters in reply as good as yours, and you will have the pleasure of seeing the trouble I must take to show as much wit as yourself."

This was a pretty little beginning. Only he does not see why the poor girl cried. Was not her dress too short, and she had no money to buy a new one? Reason enough to make any girl cry.

More letters, and then Scarron wrote and made her a definite offer. He would find the *dot* for the convent, or he would marry her himself. In the latter case, she would at least have society, a shelter, and kindness—all he could give. She chose the marriage. "I greatly preferred marrying him to marrying a convent," she said. When the notary asked what dowry the bride brought, Scarron gallantly replied: "Deux grands yeux mutins, un très-beau corsage, une paire de belles mains et beaucoup d'esprit." "And what is your settlement upon her?" "Immortality," said Scarron; "other names may perish; that of Scarron's wife will remain for ever."

Perhaps the immortality that the wife of Scarron got from her first husband was paled in the eyes of some by that greater splendour which she derived from her second; for Madame Veuve Scarron became Madame de Maintenon, wife of the Grand Monarque.

She was a good wife to the cripple; was faithful, thoughtful, and kind. She changed the aspect of the ménage, introduced order and decency, bridled the rude tongue of her husband and his friends, kept the

physic bottles in the background, and met the rough jokes of the libertine wits with an *esprit* of her own that soon reduced them. More than all, she smoothed his last years, and softened, as well as she could, the agonies that racked his tortured frame; and, in an age when conjugal infidelity was the *mode*, she was proud enough to preserve her reputation. "Il n'y a rien," she would say in after-years, and under even more trying difficulties, "de plus habile qu'une conduite irréprochable." She was tempted by her frailer sisters. Ninon de l'Enclos took her in hand, but gave her up in despair. "She was too *gauche*," Ninon said. The Ninons of the time could understand *gaucherie*, but they could not understand fidelity and pride; and with the little Françoise the poor poet's honour was safe.

His married life, every year bringing more suffering with it, lasted eight years, when he died of a hiccup, on which he promised to write a very fine satire if he ever got over it. The hiccup, however, was too strong for him, and the satire was never given to the world. He had taken the precaution to write his own epitaph beforehand. Is it too well known to be quoted? Let us try it, at least, "newly done into English:"—

No foolish envy waste on him
Who sleeps this stone beneath:
Death's pangs he felt a thousand times
Ere yet he suffered death.
Hush! traveller: let no footstep's fall
The sacred stillness break;
'Tis the first night poor Scarron sleeps:
Tread lightly—lest he wake.

He died in 1660, in the fiftieth year of his age.

It may be the case, that had Scarron never lost his health, we should have had no burlesque from him; at least, most likely he would have written nothing but a

few epigrams. Yet, as in science, so in literature, it always seems as if, were the real inventor never to have been born, some other person would, about the same time, have made the discovery. It might have been St. Amant, or Sarasin, or Boisrobert. Most likely it would have been Charles Coypeau d'Assoucy, the greatest of the small fry of imitators who followed the master. Coypeau, indeed, was a sort of vulgar Scarron. He went about the country like a *trouvère*, accompanied by a couple of singing boys, bearing a lute. He wrote a great quantity of verse; was always in trouble and disgrace; lived to a green old age; wrote a travesty of Ovid, which is now forgotten; and may now be remembered chiefly for his "Aventures Burlesques," about which there is nothing at all really burlesque, and where the chief fun turns upon his own personal cowardice, his inability to ride, and the bad luck he had at gambling.

I think that Scarron took to writing because there was nothing else in the world at which he could occupy himself and make a little money. The cast and tone of his thought were doubtless affected, to a certain extent, by his bodily sufferings. Indeed, every bodily defect, deformity, and weakness, must have its own effect, prejudicial to the intellect; and he alone, perhaps, can be a perfect writer who has a sound and perfect physique. Thus there may have been a predisposition to burlesque, resulting from his position; but the circumstances of the time and his own mocking spirit, much more than the wretched state of his body, turned him to burlesque writing. And we must remember that he wrote many other things beside burlesque.

His works (little enough read now) are voluminous, and in every branch of light literature. There exist

two editions, and only two, complete. Probably no future edition will ever be put forth. Still, he has his immortality of a kind. Like so many poets who have proclaimed their erection of a monument *ære perennius*, his prediction has been fulfilled, in a way. He is remembered, at least, as a writer who set his mark upon the age.

The "Typhon," which Mazarin refused to accept, came out in 1644, the year before he left Mans and went to Paris. It is a poem of simple buffoonery, but contains within itself abundant *promise* of burlesque; yet it is hardly burlesque proper, and bears about the same relation to the Virgil as the first edition of "Gargantua" did to the first book of "Pantagruel."

In 1648 came out the first instalment of the "Virgile Travesti," which went on at intervals until 1652. Scarron finished the first eight books; and then, growing tired of so sustained an effort, he seems to have given it up altogether. Other literary work also pressed upon him; indeed, his busiest time was between 1646 and 1653. His plays (chiefly from Spanish sources), his novels, his epigrams, his letters, his "Gazette burlesque"—all this work left little time for the Virgil, which, we suspect, was at first considered by Scarron only as the recreation of an idle hour. But it "took" as no other book of the time succeeded in doing. Imitators crowded into the field. Ovid, Homer—anybody—was burlesqued; and for a period of twenty years, after which the taste for burlesque died out almost as rapidly as it had grown up, the bookshelves were inundated with travesties, most of them mere stupid imitations of Scarron and floundering attempts at wit, with no claim to admiration except for their unblushing grossness.

Of his tales, the one chiefly remembered, because Goldsmith translated it, is the "Roman Comique." I confess to having been bored to the last degree in reading it. Of his plays, "Don Japhet de l'Arménie," one of his last, and "Jodelet," his first, are the two best, and are worthy of being read still, were life long enough. Poems he wrote—lines to his mistress, poor fellow—as gay and bright as when he had a dancing leg, as well as a laughing eye, but quite in the conventional gallantry of the time:—

Adieu, fair Chloris, adieu:
'Tis time that I speak,
After many and many a week,
('Tis not thus that at Paris we woo)
You pay me for all with a smile
And cheat me the while.
Speak now. Let me go.
Close your doors, or open them wide,
Matters not, so that I am outside;
Devil take me if ever I show
Love or pity for you and your pride.

To laugh in my face,
It is all that she grants me
Of pity and grace:
Can it mean that she wants me?
This for five or six months is my pay.
Now hear my command,
Shut your doors, keep them tight night and day,
With a porter at hand
To keep every one in;
Well I know my own mind.
The devil himself, if once you begin
To go out, couldn't keep me behind.

The following is better known. It is his description of Paris:—

Houses in labyrinthine maze;
The streets with mud bespattered all;
Palace and prison, churches, quays,
Here stately shop, there shabby stall.

Passengers black, red, gray, and white,
The pursed-up prude, the light coquette;
Murder and Treason dark as night;
With clerks, their hands with inkstains wet;
A gold-laced coat without a sou,
And trembling at a bailiff's sight;
A braggart shivering with fear;
Pages and lacqueys, thieves of night;
And mid the tumult, noise, and stink of it,
There 's Paris—Pray, what do you think of it?

We are, however, chiefly concerned with his Virgil. The burlesque effect, if we analyze the work, is produced, of course, by a perpetual antithesis between the grandeur of the personages and the manner in which they talk; between their traditional motives and the motives which Scarron ascribes to them; and between the importance of the acts described and the littleness of the actors:—

Regali conspectus in auro nuper et ostro
Migrat in obscuras humili sermone tabernas.

Thus, whatever Æneas does or says, his words and thoughts are those of a petty shopkeeper. He asks Jupiter to send down rain, some of that which the god is accustomed to bestow so freely on those occasions when it is not wanted, as when one has a new hat. When he is puzzled, as, for instance, when he wants to find some pretext for deserting Dido, he scratches his head all over. He makes the most commonplace observations with a sententious air, and an overwhelming regard to propriety; as when, moralizing over his father's death, he says:—

He 's gone—good man!—we can but weep;
Had he but learned his breath to keep,
A little later had he died.
He 's gone! in sorrow we abide;
And, as is only right, meanwhile,
I never laugh, and seldom smile.

The second and third lines remind one of the epitaph in the country churchyard:—

> Here lies the body of Alice Wooden;
> Longer she wished to live—but cooden

The most common accidents of life, when he is in his most heroic vein, are sufficient to break him down. Thus, when he is invoking the shade of his father:

> "Return once more, oh, father dear!
> Return to me—I wait you here.
> Alas! your heart is cold as stone
> To come so seldom to your son."
> Thus calling on his absent sire,
> He tried to light the lingering fire;
> But not employing, as he ought,
> The tongs to move the cinders hot,
> He burned his fingers. "Devil take,"
> He cried, "my father!—for whose sake
> I've all this trouble."
> But—good man!
> Pious by nature, he began
> Remorse to feel for this bad word—
> The first the gods had ever heard.

He tells the long story of Virgil's second and third books, and at last concludes:—

> Conticuit tandem, factoque hic fine quievit;

which Scarron translates, with some freedom:—

> This of his long tale was the sum;
> But with narrating it overcome,
> And quite weighed down with want of sleep,
> From yawning wide he could not keep,
> Queen Dido, too, yawned; for 'tis found,
> When one begins, the yawn goes round.

It is on the character of Æneas, indeed, that he spends his chief strength. Above all, he insists on the hero's unlimited command of tears:—

> Æneas pleurant comme un veau.

And again:—

Je crois vous avoir déjà dit
Qu'il donnoit des pleurs à crédit,
Et qu'il avait le don des larmes.

The persecuted hero, victim of Juno's wrath, is fat, orthodox, hypocritical, and easy-tempered. Penetrated with the propriety of seeming pious, he is careful to observe all the outward semblances of religion. His superstition is enormous, his stupidity great; his bravery is not conspicuous; his observations are trite; beneath the armour of a hero he wears the heart of a calf. In appearance a king, in reality he is an *épicier*, and he looks on life from the point of view of some respectable *bourgeois*.

With Dido, Scarron pursues the same treatment. He describes her carefully. She is a "*grosse dondon*"—what a shame to call Dido a *dondon!*—fat, vigorous, and healthy, "somewhat flat-nosed, after the fashion of most African women, but agreeable *au dernier point.*" She takes a lively interest in Æneas from the very beginning; makes a mental comparison between him and the deceased Sychæus:—

Le défunt ne le valoit pas.

She confesses her love to Anna, in words which bear an absurdly close resemblance to Virgil's:—

Quis novus hic nostris successit sedibus hospes?
Quam sese ore ferens! quam forti pectore et armis!

Ah! sister—faithful sister—tell
By what strange destiny it fell
That thus Æneas hither came?
Æneas! how I love the name!
How fresh is he!—how fat!—how fair!
How strong and big! with what an air
He tells his deeds! and what a height!
Oh! sister Anne—he charms me quite.

After dinner she calls for tobacco:—

> Mais celle n'en prit pas deux pipes
> Qu'elle ne vidât jusqu'aux tripes:
> Et ne s'en offusquait l'esprit.

And she betrays the curiosity of her sex in the most characteristic way:—

> Multa super Priamo rogitans, super Hectore multa.

This line becomes, in Scarron's hands, expanded in the following manner, peculiarly Scarronesque:—

> A hundred questions then she asks,
> Of Priam, and the mighty tasks
> Of Hector ere the siege was done;
> Of Helen—how she held her own—
> What kind of paint she used to buy;
> Was Hecuba's hair all false?—and why
> Paris was called so fair a youth?
> And then that apple—which, in truth,
> Was the first cause of all the woe—
> Was it a Ribstone—yes or no?
> Of Memnon—bright Aurora's son—
> Was he a Moor to look upon?
> Who killed him? Was it rightly said,
> About the stud of Diomed,
> That farcy killed them all?—because
> Of that disease she knew the laws;
> And when Patroclus met his end,
> How long Achilles mourned his friend?

And only in her last speech Scarron permits himself for a brief moment to leave burlesque.

The gods, of course, are lowered in the same proportions as the men and women. Jupiter, Juno, and the rest are mere *bourgeois*. Olympus might be Paris. The quarrels of the gods are those of the fish-market. The predilections, whims, and caprices are the same as those of Æneas and his friends. Mercury, in spite of his being a god, cannot fly without the wings tied to his heels, and is afraid of breaking his neck. Jupiter is

coarse and stupid, Juno intriguing and malicious, Venus alternately a courtesan and a doting mother. Thus, when Æneas has addressed her with the words:—

> O quam te memorem, virgo? namque haud tibi vultus
> Mortalis, nec vox hominem sonat. O Dea certe, &c.

she replies ("Haud equidem tali me dignor honore"):—

> "I am not really," answered she,
> "Of such exalted quality—
> Your servant, sir."
> "Too much," he cried,
> "You honour me, I'm sure. . . Beside—"
> "Oh, sir!" said Venus, making then
> A court'sy—the best-bred of men
> Turned half upon his heels, and low
> Bent to the ground with courtly bow.
> The mother's heart shed tears of joy
> To see how polished was her boy.

Often a happy anachronism, a trick well known in modern burlesque, lights up the page. Thus, Dido makes the sign of the cross; Mezentius is a blaspheming ruffian who never goes to confession; Æneas, when they land on the shores of Africa, is particularly anxious to learn whether the natives are Christians or Mahometans; the nymph Deiopeia numbers among her accomplishments the power of speaking Spanish and Italian, and she can quote "The Cid" of Corneille; Dido says "Benedicite" at table; and Pygmalion kills Sychæus with an arquebus.

Or he introduces himself, as when he says (I cannot translate it):—

> Messire Æneas, dont l'esprit
> Ne songeait alors qu'à Carthage;
> Et bien moins à faire voyage
> Que moi—cul-de-jatte follet—
> Ne songe à danser un ballet.

Or in his observation on the line

Discite justitiam moniti et non temnere Divos;

to which he remarks:—

This observation 's very well;
But what 's the good of it in hell?

But the finest specimens of burlesque, where the fun is concealed—sheathed as it were in a scabbard of grief—are to be found in his description of the fall of Troy. Æneas meets Panthus:—

Poor man! he faintly struggled on,
And gasped—his breath was almost gone
With shouting 'Fire!' The gods he bore
Safe in a basket held before;
While at his back his nephew clung.
Soon as he saw me—sorrow wrung
His noble heart. . . . .

Æneas asks:—

"Our citadel is fallen, then?"
"Alas! Æneas, king of men—
And I, its governor, seeing well
Myself would perish when it fell
If I remained, most bravely fled
(Preserving still some strength of head),
Not for the fear of death or blow,
But only just to die with you."

And for a last extract, the scene in which Æneas sorrowfully recals the days of the past:—

By that gate fair Andromache
Would pass, papa-in-law to see,
And ere those fatal Greek attacks
Would bring with her Astyanax.
Queen Hecuba's continued joy
Was to caress and kiss the boy.
When he was but a tiny child
She dandling him her hours beguiled;
And when he somewhat bigger grew
This good grandam, a baby too,

Would play with him. Sometimes the Queen
Would tell him of fair Melusine,
And Fierabras, of wondrous Jack,
And all the old tales in the pack:
The child her idol was, and pet:
Sometimes so doting did she get,
That she would even ride cock-horse,
A stick between her legs, and course
All up and down, till, tired and weak,
She could not either breathe or speak.
Andromache oft plainly said
That grandmamma would spoil the lad:
And Priam, when he saw him cram
His mouth all day with bread and jam,
Remarked with some severity,
The boy would surely ruined be.

Burlesque has its times of splendour and decadence, like every other form of literature. At times of strong belief and general enthusiasm it cannot exist. When enthusiasms die out, and ardour cools, when some people are conscious of having been fools, and others are laughing at them, burlesque has its opportunities. Old idols and heroes are fair game. Mythical history, for instance, seen from the modern point of view, is a proper subject, and it is pardonable to upset old notions of which people are tired. Classical idolatry, in Scarron's time, was over. In our own age, in England, there is no real burlesque possible, because we have got rid, some years since, of our old-fashioned enthusiasms; and we are only just beginning to put things *en train* for our young men to have, in another ten years or so, a red-hot start, with a grand battle before them. After it is all over, perhaps there will be more burlesque.

Chapter XIII.

LA FONTAINE.

Qu'un petit docteur au front chauve
Dise que les jeux sont maudits ;
Je n'en crois rien : si l'esprit sauve,
La Fontaine est en paradis.—Le Brun.

WE all think we know Fontaine. To begin with, we made an imperfect acquaintance with him at school, where we translated *vix*, with difficulty, two or three of his Fables, and, naturally enough, conceived a lively contempt for a writer who could employ, in cold blood, French of so idiomatic a nature. How different from the great Cæsar, who, mindful of his destiny, wrote for the third form! This early prejudice soon enough vanishes; but we generally read little more of him, and there remains in the minds of most of us a sort of blurred image where the figure of La Fontaine should be. The photograph is clouded.

The small knowledge which the world has of a man who was once, and is still, one of the most popular writers in French literature, springs partly from our habit of considering him as a mere writer of fables.

Fables, indeed, he wrote—the best in the world—but the Fable, however clever it be, is not a form of literature over which the mature intellect greatly cares to linger: Æsop, Phædrus, and Gay rarely become the companions of our solitude. What is called "the taste of the age" makes us ignore the fact, or at least keep it in the background, that La Fontaine also wrote tales, and that as a *raconteur*, even in France, the chosen home of the story-teller, he had, and has, no equal.

Let me make an attempt to delineate the man. It is not an easy task; for we have before us a bundle of contradictions—contradictions, that is, more obvious than the average pack which go to make up the ordinary man. While he had no virtue himself, he drew to himself and retained the affections of virtuous men—Racine, for instance, even after Racine had gone back to the piety of his early youth. He had no constancy, yet he attracted the love of women, whose idol and plaything he always was. He deserted his wife and went after strange goddesses; he wrote verses which ought not now to be read at all; and yet Fénelon himself, the most virtuous man of his time, burst into tears at his death, and wrote his panegyric. He never put himself out of the way to please people whom he did not like, but all people liked him. He was a bad husband, and a bad father. He never performed a duty, or recognized a tie; yet he never lost a friend—save once by a kind of accident. He was always in poverty, but he was always contented. He had no ambition, yet he achieved a great reputation. He lived an utterly godless life, but died the death of a saint. He had no money, but never did any task work. He was the most malicious of men, and yet the most good-natured. He was by turns, and as the sweet will seized

him, *gauche*, awkward, *distrait*, or courtly, polite, and urbane. He lived for himself, wholly and unreservedly, but was never called selfish; and in early life he sat down with the avowed intention of doing nothing, claiming from the world the simple right of enjoyment; and this right the world conceded.

The world, indeed, loves its butterflies; they are so rare that it cannot but love them; only seldom does a man get born who has no capacity for work, no power of foresight, no care about the future; one on whom life brings no anxieties, whose years only prolong his childhood; whose brow is furrowed with no lines of thought. *Volages* and uncertain, they fly from flower to flower, lingering over each one just long enough to take its honey. Their life is a succession of summer months; and, unless they early burn their wings, which sometimes happens, it is a long summer of delights, spent with *Amour*, *Liesse*, and *Doux-Regard*, in the garden of *Déduit*.

England has had but few of these gaudy and brilliant-winged creatures, her sky, perhaps, being unfavourable to their production. Herrick was one, but his erratic course was prematurely checked by the untimely frost of the Revolution; Gay, Moore, and a very few others, exhaust our list. To set against these, France has Rutebeuf, Villon, Marot, La Fontaine, and half a hundred others, who have fluttered in the sunshine of great men's smiles and the world's praise—insects of the summer. And of all this careless and improvident crew, the most careless and the most improvident was Jean de la Fontaine.

Arguing from strong points of resemblance between two great men, one is disposed to think that Harold Skimpole modelled his own character on that of La

Fontaine—the disciple being far below the master. For La Fontaine was more Skimpolean than Harold himself. He said to the world, "Give me leave to live among you; a little light wine, fruit in the season, plenty of music and singing, the society of young, pretty, and pleasant women, and an entire freedom from work and anxiety—these are all I ask. Give them to me, and let me enjoy myself after my own fashion." The world took him at his word, and gave him all he asked. For threescore years and ten he did no work, he had no troubles; he dispensed with all unpleasant things; he enjoyed the society of pleasant women and the luxuries of rich men; and then, with a repentance comfortable and leisurely—La Fontaine was never in a hurry—for all sins and shortcomings not included or implied in the above, he quietly went out of the world in a green and serene old age.

If the highest object of life be to get what La Fontaine got, of all men he was the happiest. What Harold Skimpole wished to appear, La Fontaine *was;* a half-unconscious humbug, the one; simple and without guile, the latter. His friend Maucroix, writing of him after his death, says:—"We have been friends for more than fifty years, and I thank God for having brought the extreme friendship I felt for him to a respectable old age, without interruption or any coldness, so that I can say that I have always loved him tenderly, the last day as much as the first. He was the most sincere and the most candid soul I have ever known; never any disguise, and I think that he never lied in all his life." He *never did*, except when he wrote flatteries for the king. He neither lied, nor quarrelled, nor envied, nor intrigued, in a time full of lies, quarrels, and envy. In return, all men conspired

to smoothe his path for him. Like a child, they let him out to amuse himself in the garden and the meadows till the time came when the sun set and night fell, and there could be no more play. Then they brought him home, persuaded him to say his prayers, and put him to bed, where he very soon fell fast asleep.

He was born in 1621, midway between the births of Corneille and Racine, at the little town of Château-Thierry, in that pleasant Champagne land which has produced so many poets, as well as such excellent wine. His father held a post as *maître ès eaux et forêts*, and was a well-to-do man, something above the middle class. No anecdotes are told about his childhood, except the suggestive fact that he was always remarkably lazy, which is probably not without truth. On leaving school, he took it into his head that he would become a priest, and went to an ecclesiastical seminary, where he actually remained for a whole year. Thence he went back into the world, and took the taste of this monastic twelvemonth out of his mouth by five years of idleness and pleasure, courting the "*gentilles Gauloises*" of Rheims and Château-Thierry, and not writing anything but love songs. Then his father, thinking to make his son *un homme rangé*, a serious *maître ès eaux et forêts*, married him, and resigned his post in his favour. Slight, however, as were the duties connected with the post—he only had to walk about a little in the fields, under the shade of the trees—they were too irksome for La Fontaine, and oppressed him beyond measure. His wife, too, bored him; this mistaken woman—to whom he used to write in very kind and even affectionate terms when he was well away from her—used to spend her time in reading romances, and, instead of looking after her husband's comfort, as all

the rest of his friends had to do, expected La Fontaine to look after hers. Accordingly, he neglected his domestic as well as his official duties. There was a certain Abbess de Mouzou, among other fair friends, to whom he writes a letter, sprightly and gay enough. "When," he says, "you took the vows—

> On that same day, Love, pretty fool,
> Assumed the Benedictine rule;
> Venus, since you were also one,
> Became a Benedictine nun;
> And Mirth, with all his careless flock,
> Put on the Benedictine frock.
> The Graces—how could they desert you?—
> Swore to all Benedictine virtue;
> And all the gods that Cyprus knows
> Took on them Benedictine vows.

Nor is this gay *religieuse* the only Lesbia of whom mention is made, and it is greatly to be feared that his infidelities were not borne by the wife with that proper spirit of resignation which becomes the wife of a butterfly of the Muses—*papilio Musarum*.

Soon after his marriage he made his first literary essay, in the shape of a translation of Terence's "Eunuchus," which neither succeeded nor deserved success. For the curious thing is, that La Fontaine, whose talents were exercised wholly in the lightest possible form of literature, the touch of whose pen was too light to brush the rouge from a woman's cheek, had, all through his life, proclivities in the direction of scholarship. Ignorant of Greek, he read Plato in translations, and even tried, in his *Songe de Vaux*, to imitate his philosophy. He loved to talk of Greek writers, though no one seems to have thought his observations worth preserving; and just as Liston thought his *forte* was tragedy, so La Fontaine sighed for the renown of a

scholar. This departure from the natural tenor of his life was due, perhaps, to some touch of the weakness common to man; he could not be wholly a butterfly. He was corrupted, too, by his friends, who raved of Latin and Greek, and translated Seneca and Plato; doubtless they inspired him, naturally a sympathetic man, with some small portion of their own ardour. For though the old rage for scholarship had in a manner abated, there were yet left some remains, and men gave the world editions, translations, and imitations, if not so freely as fifty years back, at least in abundance.

Meantime, the *ménage* went on badly. His father was dead, leaving his affairs complicated; the "woods and waters" grew daily more irksome, and at last he sold the post, proposing for the future to live upon the proceeds. However, he got full leisure, and began, fortunately for everybody, to read the old French writers, Jean de Meung, Villon, Marot, and Rabelais—the glories of free and unacademized France. "Do you think," asked La Fontaine once of Boileau, who was discoursing on Augustine, "do you think that Augustine had as much *esprit* as Rabelais?"—a question of magnificent profundity, showing the true student of Rabelais. This reading proved the turning point of his life. He left off trying to be a scholar, and allowed his mind to follow its natural bent. But he never ceased to admire and to love those old classics which seem destined never to lose their hold on men's minds. He read them perpetually. His translation of Plato was scored and interlined, and black with marginal references. He would dream away whole days over Horace and Virgil. He accepted the doctrines they laid down as things not to be disputed. He

would hear no criticism on their words; and he became so steeped in their writings that his own are full of imitations and echoes—not plagiarisms. Hear what he says himself:—

> Some imitators, like a flock of sheep,
> For ever in the steps of Virgil keep:
> Him for my shepherd while I proudly own,
> Sometimes I stray, and dare to walk alone;
> And though my Virgil lead me, let him have
> Me for his pupil, never for his slave.
> His be the model, his the glorious laws
> By which he rightly won a world's applause.
> These let me follow; if perchance I dare
> To borrow something from the riches there,
> Let it, at least, *attempt* to seem in place,
> And veil in fashions new its antique face.

It was not till he was past thirty that La Fontaine began to be known in private circles as an extremely clever writer of *vers de société*. About this time he was introduced by his wife's uncle, M. Jannart, to the great Fouquet, who received him kindly, and gave him a pension, coupled with the easy condition that he would write him a ballad once a quarter. Then followed nine years, all too short, of feasting, love-making, reading, and perfect happiness, chiefly apart from his wife. Vaux, Fouquet's magnificent palace, the forerunner of Versailles, contained all that La Fontaine wanted, and more. Fouquet, possessed of enormous wealth, spent it regally. He had Pellisson for his secretary, Le Vau for his architect, Le Brun for his painter, Vatel for his maître d'hôtel, La Fontaine and Molière for his poets. And all these dependents loved him. Little they knew, most of them, of the outer intrigues, the plots against the cardinal, Colbert's crafty web of lies and treacheries, the deceits and meannesses of the king, and the long array of misdeeds which ended in the fall

of their benefactor. La Fontaine, for one, was all the time in the garden, basking in the sun, and talking to the pretty women about love, and Plato, and all the little *caquetage* that pleased him. How was he to know anything about it? But the crash came. Fouquet was arrested, his friends were dispersed, and La Fontaine, forty-two years of age, found himself without a protector, and with very few shillings, as we may well suppose.

Jannart, one of Fouquet's closest adherents, was exiled to Limoges, whither La Fontaine, in the first burst of his grief, accompanied him. On the way he picked up his spirits a little, and wrote long and amusing letters, kind, if not affectionate, interspersed with verse, to his wife. "After all," he says, "it is a real pleasure to travel. One always meets with something remarkable. And *you would hardly believe how good the butter is*." He tells the story of La Belle Barigny of Poitiers, whose lover dying, left her 12,000 crowns. His relations dispute the will. The lady, disconsolate, swearing she will die of grief, "*en attendant recueillit le legs que son amant lui avait fait*"—a touch entirely Fontainesque. The country round Orleans pleases him greatly, by reason of its verdure, and freedom from those detestable *montagnes pelées*, those bare peaks, which every one hates so. At Amboise, where Fouquet was then confined, he tries to visit the prisoner, but is not allowed, and spends the whole day in tears at the door, thinking sadly of the past nine years and the fat kine. He did not stay long at Limoges, finding the air of exile oppressive, and, ceasing his voluntary participation in misfortune, he returned to his wife, and shortly after became a father, not greatly to his own delight. For La Fontaine was not fond of children,

the *petit peuple*—"*cet âge sans pitié*"—of whom he always speaks with such petulance. How should he be? A child himself, as exacting, and consequently as jealous, as children always are. He spent the next few years between Paris and Château-Thierry, his wife sometimes going with him to Paris, but getting tired of change, and settling down gradually to her home in Château-Thierry; La Fontaine, for his part, gravitating toward Paris. Here his friends were the best writers of the day: Boileau, Racine, Molière, and others. Notably the drunken bard Chapelle, he whom Boileau once lectured on the sin of intemperance, his repentant disciple plying him with wine until the preacher was drunk himself.

He was now about forty-five years of age, and had hitherto published nothing except his miserable comedy. But he made two new and powerful friends: the dowager Duchess of Orleans, who made him one of the gentlemen of her household, and the Duchess de Bouillon, one of Mazarin's nieces, who sometimes lived at Château-Thierry. She, young, and full of cleverness and wit, caressed and indulged to the utmost this spoiled child of nine *lustra*. She made him use her house as his own—one wonders how the wife liked the arrangement—and even when she went away, left orders that everything was to be at La Fontaine's disposal. This was what he liked. He cared nothing for the ordinary ambitions of the world. To please the king and be about the court was all very well for Racine and Boileau. *They* had morals, or, at least, a tolerable reputation for morality; he had none. *They* had decorum and a proper respect for forms; these he lacked. He loved better to live without *gêne* at the duchess's little court of the Luxembourg, where he could go about in

perfect freedom, without fear of a royal frown, and safe in the sunshine of those soft hearts that never played him false; where he could do as he pleased, and say what he pleased.

History regretfully has to confess that his first tales were written at the request of Madame de Bouillon. These were so sparkling, so witty, and so highly *goûtés* by the ladies for whose edification they were written, that the poet was easily persuaded to write more, and to go on writing more; piling up abundance of material for repentance when the time for repentance should come. He did more than this; he published, being then in his forty-eighth year, his first collection of Fables.

It is extremely curious to observe how long a time the flower of his genius took to blossom and come to perfection. At an age when most poets have filled whole desks he had written nothing at all. At an age when many authors are in the very summer of their powers, he was putting forth timidly a poor little translation from the Latin. And when some men are beginning to bethink them of rest after a good day's work, La Fontaine, unconscious of his years, takes to writing tales which belong to the mere wantonness of early manhood; and fables which show at once a child's keen delight in trifles, the subtle perceptions, the "long thoughts" of childhood, and the facile versification of the most practised poet.

As soon as these things appeared their author became, *per saltum*, the most popular writer in France. None had spoken like him before. He had no court airs, such as Racine sometimes put on. He was no pedant as Boileau sometimes was. He did not think it necessary to lash himself into fury at the follies of his

fellows; nor did he ever sneer at them; nor did he pretend to bind himself by any laws. He suited his verse to his subject, not his subject to his verse, and used short lines and long lines, odd rhymes and even rhymes, just as best fitted his theme. Hence his language was so bright and clear, and the verse was so light that no mountain brook could trip more merrily over its pebbles than his stories over their cadenced channel of rhyme. His thought and his verse were wedded, and became one. For, just as the crafty chemist, by a process known only to himself, invents by cunning combination some new and delightful essence, so La Fontaine, taking plentifully of the old classical spirit, and of the Gallic spirit *quantum suff.*, and artfully compounding these in the alembic of his brain, produced a poetical result which was as new as it was pleasant, being, in fact, to other poetry, what champagne is to other wine. His tales and his fables were dramas, without the dramatic rules, for La Fontaine was a bad playwright. They were not written in five acts, but, as he said himself, in a hundred. Their chief strength lay in their perfect truthfulness to nature,—the great charm in his writings as in his character. Therein, as in a mirror, every man saw reflected his own impulses and thoughts; or, to use another simile, the writer seemed to take each reader into his confidence, while he went about, like a curious girl, and, with a certain feminine delicacy, lifting up just the corner of the curtain of the soul, afforded the merest peep into what was behind, with his finger on his lips and a smile in his eyes; the play of a child, perhaps, but of a child careful never to wound.

Above all, his work was most carefully finished. There was no slovenly execution about La Fontaine.

Lazy though he was, *l'enfant de la paresse et du sommeil*, as he called himself, he would give nothing to the world but what was his best. He did no task work; but the labour that he delighted in physicked pain. It was at once his chosen amusement and his work. And, as Thackeray wisely says, he is the happiest man who gets the work to do best fitted to his hand, and does not get tired of it.

Fifteen years passed by. He got separated, without any scandal, from his wife, whom he never saw again. Once, indeed, Boileau persuaded him to go to Château-Thierry, and try to effect a reconciliation. He journeyed there, found she was at church, and came all the way back again, without waiting till the service was ended, comforting himself with the reflection that he had done all that was possible. He went on writing tales and fables and letters, growing in reputation yearly but not increasing in fortune, and living on the bounty of his two duchesses.

Then misfortune fell upon him. The Duchess of Orleans died; two years later the Duchess de Bouillon was exiled; and poor La Fontaine, now in his fifty-ninth year, as childlike and as innocent as ever, found himself upon the world, once more, without a penny.

Of course, it mattered nothing. Of course, other friends came to his assistance. Condé, the Prince of Conti, the Duke of Vendôme, gave him money and helped him along till he found another patron, who took him in, and adopted him, so to speak, for her own son. This time it was Madame de la Sablière.

Surely, of all fair sinners, there are few upon whom the world has looked with more indulgent eyes than on this accomplished and learned lady. One of the queens of Parisian society, the companion of *savants*, a mathe-

matician, a Greek scholar, she was at the same time a poetess, a musician, and the heroine of a thousand *amourettes*. Her husband was little disposed to quarrel with her for indiscretions for which his own notorious infidelities—he had the bad taste to die broken-hearted at the loss of a mistress—gave her, in the eyes of the world, at least, some excuse. Whatever form these indiscretions had previously taken, whether they were innocent or not, matters very little now; only we must remark that Madame de la Sablière was already forty years of age when she experienced an attack of that *grande passion* which was almost as inevitable in her times as the measles, and much more dangerous. The object of her love was the Marquis de la Fare, an interesting young gentleman some ten years her junior, of poetic proclivities and most refined tastes. For some time the *liaison* went on at fever heat; the lovers would spend whole days together—with all the accompaniments of poetry and the finest cream-laid sentiment. The ardour of the gentleman was the first to cool, and our middle-aged Sappho perceived with tears that her charms could not altogether supplant those of the gaming-table. With regret she took the second place in her lover's heart. Presently another rival came into the field: a woman this time. It was too much. Poor Madame de la Sablière threw up the game. Her husband dead—perhaps this was no great loss; her lover gone; her last illusions perished—she bravely resolved to leave a world which had no longer any charms for her, and to spend the remaining years of her life in seclusion and good works. She shut her house and went no more into society. "I have sent away," she wrote, "all my people, except my dog, my cat, and La Fontaine."

This rival was, it is sad to say, a friend of the poet's. He had always two sets of friends, one for serious moods, which were few, and one for his days of good spirits, which were many. She was La Champmeslé, the actress. Racine, before he was converted, taught her how to act. La Fontaine dedicated tales to her; her husband wrote comedies for her; and all the world fell in love with her. Of her worthy husband Boileau maliciously wrote:—

> De six amants contents et non jaloux,
> Qui tour à tour servaient à Madame Claude,
> Le moins volage était Jean, son époux.

The end of the gallant De la Fare, poet and lover, divided, as it were, between Pallas Athênê and Erycina Ridens, was unworthy of so splendid a beginning. He became a tremendous gourmand, and actually killed himself by eating too much cod-fish.

It was in the year when La Fontaine's benefactress retreated from the world that he was elected into the Academy. The choice was not unanimous. The king wanted the election of Boileau, a younger man, but clearly more worthy in many respects of the honour. President Rose, the leader of the opposition, made a violent speech against La Fontaine. Flinging the unfortunate volumes of Tales upon the table, he demanded whether the Academy would submit to the king the name of a man who had written a book *flétri par une sentence de police.* He was, however, chosen, in spite of the opposition. The king refused at first to ratify his election; nor was it till La Fontaine had written two or three odes brimful of flattery, and Boileau had actually been elected to another vacant chair, and the wayward poet—this naughty child of sixty-three—had given a distinct and solemn promise to be

sage, to be a good boy and never write any more wicked stories, that Louis gave his consent, and La Fontaine joyfully passed those doors which seem to lead to immortality. On the day of his reception, with the first throbbings of a repentant awe upon him, he read a contrite epistle in verse to Madame de la Sablière, regretting his past sins and promising amendment for the future.

Pleased with his election, La Fontaine became one of the most regular attendants at the *séances* of the Academy, where it does not appear that he greatly contributed to the work done, but where he enjoyed the pleasure of feeling himself among the learned, and pocketed his share of the forty livres distributed at every sitting. He made new friends in the Hervaut family, however, who helped him to forget his promise to the king and the Academy. Among them he found once more, what he could hardly get in the house of La Champmeslé, but which was the chief grace and beauty of life to him—the society of young and beautiful ladies. With them he renewed his youth, and forgot the crow's feet and grey hairs of sixty years. He was always in love with them; he wrote them verses, made jokes for them; was contented to be laughed at. "What is the use," he said, "of old *radoteurs* like me but to make the girls laugh?" He was the same once more as he had been forty years before; and in this society, the Capua of his old age, he forgot all his promises of reform, and repeated all his old offences. A certain Madame Ulrich, with whom he contracted some sort of *amourette*, stimulated him to indite more tales, and his last were more sprightly, more witty, and more wicked than any he had previously written. In vain his friends tried to bring

him to a better mind. His wings were heavy now and his flight feeble, but there was yet left a day or two of the bright Indian summer of his life, and he would not rest till the cold frosts of winter actually laid him low.

He had no money, of course, except what he got from the sale of his Fables, which he probably spent as fast as he got it. His wife lived still at Château-Thierry, and his son was brought up by friends. A story is told how La Fontaine met him once by accident, and how, after he had admired the young man's modesty and manner, he was told that it was his own son. "Indeed?" he said, simply, "I am very glad to hear it." Occasionally he got a little *honorarium;* once, for instance, from the Dauphin, as an acknowledgment for his Fables; and probably his old friend the Duchess de Bouillon did not altogether forget him. At all events, his life was greatly simplified by his free quarters in the Hôtel Sablière.

But he even outlived his benefactor. Madame de la Sablière died when her poet was seventy-two years of age, and once more he was turned out upon the world, a beggar. Hervaut, going to offer him hospitality, met him in the street, crying over the death of the kindest and best friend he had ever had. "Come to my house," said Hervaut. "I was going there," sobbed the poet. He went there, and stayed there till he died.

And now the cold winds of autumn were set in in earnest. The November of life—the month when all butterflies must disappear—was upon him. To everybody comes a time when the flowers fade, and their perfume, long since faint, wholly dies. To La Fontaine it came very late, but it came at last. He was seized with a disease which the physicians pronounced

mortal, and began to patch up a hurried peace with the church. His repentance was most sincere and real, though the world laughs at the manner in which it was manifested; for he began by reading the New Testament, a book altogether strange to him, and gravely pronounced it to be a work of considerable merit. It was at least fifty years since he had read it last, and it had all the charms of novelty to him. He had previously, many years before, made a partial acquaintance with the Apocrypha; for Racine once showed him a passage from Baruch, which he read with great interest, and went about for a fortnight afterwards asking everybody if they had read that excellent author, Baruch. Again, on his confessor representing to him the grave injury to public morals that his Tales had caused, the honest and contrite bard, who never quite understood the mischief he had done, offered, with many tears, to give to the church the profits of his next edition;—which is much as if a remorseful burglar were to promise the proceeds of his next robbery in expiation for all the preceding. Getting over these preliminaries—it was natural that, after so many years of a life so *déréglé*, he should feel at first a little strange in the harness of virtue—he set himself steadily, no longer a butterfly, but rather a chrysalis, to do everything acceptable to the church. He made public lamentation over his sins at the Academy; he burned his unpublished writings; he projected hymns; he wrote a translation of the *Dies Iræ;* he wore a hair shirt; he practised rigours; he repented indeed. "Oh! mon cher," he writes, "mourir n'est rien; mais songes-tu que je vais comparaître devant mon Dieu! Tu sais comme j'ai vécu. Avant que tu reçoives ce billet les portes de l'éternité seront ouvertes pour moi."

These gates, indeed, were soon to open for him. He died, the year following his conversion, painlessly and happily, in the arms of Racine, his old and dear friend, who was himself to follow five years later. All France burst into tears, and everybody felt with his nurse, "Dieu n'aura pas le courage de le damner."

La Fontaine presents a singular example of a man who, throughout a long life, persevered in a course calculated above all things to enfeeble the will and deaden the conscience, and yet preserved his moral fibre strong enough to change suddenly and entirely in extreme old age. He had set his face steadily against all unpleasant things; he would do no manner of work; he chose the part of the lilies of the field, and would neither toil nor spin, preferring to enjoy the summer sun and the warm rain. But when the end came, and the inevitable stared him in the face, a thing which could no longer be shirked or forgotten, he emerged from his carelessness, and with a nature as fresh and buoyant as ever, not only repented, but tried to undo the mischief he had done.

It must be confessed that he had done a good deal of mischief in his day. But "evil is wrought by want of thought, as well as want of heart." What La Fontaine had done amiss was chiefly done by want of thought. Like Adam, he fell at the temptation of woman. His fair but frail Benedictine, the ladies of Vaux, the Duchess de Bouillon, La Champmeslé, and Madame Ulrich, were ever at his ear, prompting him to write clever things, which, to be amusing, must needs be wicked, while Madame de la Sablière was the only woman who urged him to repentance. Pleased with his own dexterity, he acceded to the tempters, like a

child; and like a child, as soon as he saw that punishment must needs follow offence, he began to be sorry and to cry. His great power of inspiring affection was mainly due to this touching simplicity and childishness. But besides, he had that indefinable quality which brings to some men the love of everybody, if not their respect. Weak of will, to all seeming, till he was forced into strength by contrition; prone to think lightly of vice and to laugh at follies, rather than to be indignant with them, yet always with the possibility before him of higher things; always sinning, yet always dreaming of the Utopian future, where virtue should be all in all—he ought hardly to be judged like other men. The function of his life was that of the butterfly, to repeat our old simile, which, while all the world is at work, relieves the mind by the spectacle of one creature, at least, who takes no thought and has no toil. And this function he performed with an entire and guileless simplicity, without affectation or pretence. Of affectation, indeed, he was incapable. There is no quality in La Fontaine more insisted on by his biographers than this perfect candour. Numberless stories are told to illustrate the way in which he always laid bare his mind. Thus—one of them will do—being once bored by the company at a dinner, he rose abruptly, and said he must go, having to be present at the Academy. "You will be too early," was objected. "Oh! no," said La Fontaine, "I shall go there by the longest way."

Sometimes he would be seized with long fits of solitude. Then he would eschew all society and go away by himself, speaking to no one, and sitting for hours under a tree, reading or musing, as happy with his own thoughts as ever Lord Foppington was with his. His

book would generally be some Latin author, and his friends learned how to respect moods of taciturnity which were not morose, but a sort of natural repose of the body while the mind digested its ideas. Perhaps it is on account of these fits of silence that we have such widely differing accounts of him as a companion; one biographer setting him forth as *gauche* and *distrait*, the other as the most charming man of society. He was both in turns, for he made no concessions; and if people did not please him he made no effort to please them; while if he was in congenial society he bubbled over with joyous fun and innocent *malice*.

One must perforce compare him with Goldsmith, with whom he has many points of resemblance. The Boswells and Philistines of the day turned from both with repugnance and dislike. The society of ladies was to both what the light is to the flower; wherever it shone thither their heads were turned. Oliver was softer-hearted, less dreamy, more alive to the sorrows of others; but his mind was cast in a less delicate mould, and we may look there in vain for that fine subtlety and felicity of expression which distinguish La Fontaine above all writers.

One thing more. His writings do not *want*, in order to be understood, a knowledge of his life or of his times. What he wrote, whether in fable or in tale, owes its interest to no local colouring, and bears no stamp of his century, save its *cadre*, the framework of language. This is the strongest proof of his genius. To write *for* all time and *of* all time, to give illustrations of human nature which will serve for any place or any age of human society—this is what very few writers have done. We step from the classical and powdered school of Corneille and Racine, from the prim and arti-

ficial garden of Boileau, to a free and open ideal world, where men and women walk and talk unfettered by influences of time and country. What cared the poet for Louis Quatorze and all his splendour? To him the disputes of scholars and theologians were merely empty words. Port-Royal or the Sorbonne, Jansenist or Jesuit—he cared little which won. And he left the Hôtel de Rambouillet, in his time certainly fallen from its high estate, to lay down its laws and formulate its decrees without his interference. The present was nothing to the poet. Like the virtuous man, in this respect at least, the outer world might have crashed around him without disturbing him from his reverie, or causing him an anxiety for the future.

The great mistake of his life, which by his very nature he could not perhaps avoid, was the obstinacy with which he clung to youth. He would not, or could not, grow old. And as his mind, so are his writings; these are always young. Flashes there are, in abundance, of a genius higher than any that France had yet seen. They are only flashes; they hold out promise of great things, never to be fulfilled. All his Tales should have been written before he was thirty, and put on the shelf to make room for that more solid work which he might have given to the world. But this was too much exertion for La Fontaine; he preferred polishing the gems—like his Fables—which mark the workman of infinite cunning and craft, and *possible* power. The promise was never fulfilled, and La Fontaine's work is the work of a young man. In the same way, we look in his life for the man, and only find the child; a marvellous child indeed, spoiled by indulgence and caresses, wayward and self-willed, but preserving still his childlike sunny nature, his love for all who love

him, his childish selfishness, his childish inability to comprehend the nature of duty, and his readiness to repent directly he can be made to understand that he has done wrong.

Such was La Fontaine; full of faults, in spite of which, perhaps on account of which, we love him now as everybody loved him then. Before we judge him let us remember the words written of him by that great and good man, Fénelon. "Lisez-le," says the Bishop, "et dites si Anacréon a su badiner avec plus de grâce; si Horace a paré la philosophie d'ornements plus poétiques et plus attrayants; si Térence a peint les mœurs des hommes avec plus de naturel et de vérité."

Chapter XIV.

BOILEAU.

Tout ce qui n'est pas clair n'est pas Français.

"SPEAK no harm of Boileau," said Voltaire; "ça porte malheur." It is a pious superstition observed by all. French writers, indeed, are proud of their great Despréaux, and unwilling, save in times of controversy, such as that of the Romantic movement, to detract by any unkind criticism from his great fame. He is like some old idol to whom, though younger gods have come and gone, the people yet do reverence by habit. The dust has settled thick upon him and blurred his face; his ornaments and trappings are tarnished; the gilt sword has dropped from his hands; he seems to have no longer any power for good or for evil; and yet through the cobwebs and the dust you may still mark the calm cold eyes, the clean-set chin, the firm lips that tell of strength.

The father of Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux was Registrar to the Great Chamber of Paris, and in that centre of the earth was born the satirist in November, 1636. It was in the same room in which the "Satyre

Ménippée" had been written. Nicolas was the eleventh child of the registrar. The eldest brother, Gilles, was already a poet and scholar of some reputation when Nicolas was born. Another brother, Jacques, canon of the Sainte-Chapelle, also achieved distinction as a historian and antiquary. A third brother, Jerome, succeeded his father in the post of registrar. We have thus a family of considerable respectability, a point which was not without its influence on the future satirist.

The childhood of young Nicolas was not fortunate. He lost his mother at two years of age, and was no favourite with his father. Afflicted too with a dire disease, he was subjected to a terrible operation, unskilfully performed, which gave him uneasiness during the whole of his life. He was thus a quiet and gentle boy, incapacitated for the rude sports of other children, and driven back upon his own resources, which did not leave him altogether unhappy. Alone in a garret he spent whole days poring over romances and poetry. His father allowed him to do as he pleased, a little indignant, as fathers of poets always are, at the waste of valuable time, and occasionally remarking, with that absence of discrimination which also characterizes fathers of poets, that Nicolas was a good lad who would never do harm to others or good to himself. Everybody has a sneer at the parents of poets. For my own part, seeing the entire impossibility of predicting poetical success, its rarity, its slender marketable value, and the fact that poetry may be pursued with any other calling, I am disposed to agree with M. Boileau *père*, and the other anxious parents who rightly enough rank the certainty of material comfort far above the chance of glory. This, after all, if you get it, means chiefly the

standing in a conspicuous place on the shelves, and occasionally having your character dissected, and perhaps your reputation destroyed, by the critics, long after it has been firmly established.

He was educated at the College of Beauvais, where he made himself remarked by a singular aptitude for writing verses. At the age of eighteen he produced his first serious attempt, happily now as dead as the dodo. He wrote also certain bad tragedies. While it is the best thing possible for an aspirant to attempt any kind of writing, the exercise giving fluency to his style, command of language, and facility of expression, it must be owned that the world has ever cause for congratulation when the youthful efforts of a poet are lost.

The boy became a man, but always grave, sober, and studious. There are no *emportements de la jeunesse;* none of the mad folly which the world laughs at and excuses. Boileau was *sage*, a little *malin*, perhaps, fond of that kind of good story which makes you laugh at the smaller misfortunes of your neighbour—that is to be expected, because he was a Frenchman—but good-natured at bottom, and careful on the whole not to say or do anything which might give pain. He first began to study law, but gave it up in disgust after being called. Years afterwards he manifested his hatred to law when he drew the character of Chicane in the "Lutrin."

> Between those old supports, by which the wall
> Supports the mass of this stupendous hall,
> There stands a pillar known and cursed by fame,
> Where the litigious Norman shouts his claim.
> Here, on a dusty pile of parchments old
> A Sibyl sits each day to screech and scold;
> Chicane her name: no single thought of right
> Her ceaseless clamour calms, or clears her sight;
> Beside her throng her children—shaking Fear;
> Famine and Ruin—shameful brood—are here.

Around their mother's throne they press, and still
With loud laments the troubled echoes fill:
She, poring always over precedents,
To work new ruin, pleadings new invents,
House, castle, palace, at one stroke o'erthrows,
And adds more cases to the countless rows.
A hundred times has Themis wept to see
Her balance weighed by Chicane's subtlety.
From shape to shape she turns, by magic might;
Now like the blinking owls she shuns the light,
Now like a hungry lion glares around;
Now like a serpent crawls along the ground.

He then turned his attention to theology, took orders, and for a time held a small benefice worth some eight hundred francs, though he was never a theologian. And once, but only once, we hear of Boileau in love. No one is wholly exempt from the fatal passion. A studious life, a pre-occupied mind, a cold temperament, ill-health, these did not apparently protect Boileau. Of the passion we learn but little. Its object was his cousin, Marie Porcher de Bretonville. The love-making, apparently conducted on different principles from those which guide most suitors, ended in Boileau selling his benefice and devoting the proceeds to his mistress, not, light-minded reader, with the frivolous object of procuring the poor girl dresses, gaiety, society, some of the light and brightness of life, but with the grave and solemn end of *putting her into a convent.* A curious and suggestive story. Boileau is in love; he shows it by making his mistress a nun. Poor poet! poor Marie! One pictures her carrying his image in her heart, pining away for fifty years or so—nuns take a long time to pine—while she treasures up still the memory of a wooing, pleasant while it lasted, though cold as ice.

Boileau, in reality, was incapable of love. That is

the secret of his coldness, his want of sympathy, the uniformity of his colouring. The *power* of loving, not the fact that a man has loved, gives to literature what the atmosphere gives to nature, its colour, its half shades, its repression of outline, its haze, softness, and tone. All this is wanting in Boileau, because he was without the yearning after the other sex which makes poets of us all. He had no mother, no wife, no mistress—even an *amourette* would have been something—no single woman whom he loved.

At the age of twenty-four he begins to write his satires. The first, in imitation of the third satire of Juvenal, was found by Furetière among the papers of Gilles Boileau, to whom it had probably been submitted for criticism. He read it, liked it, carried it away, and showed it about. It had immediate success. Young Nicolas was invited to the Hôtel de Rambouillet, where he made the acquaintance of Chapelain, Cotin, and the rest of the tuneful throng. He went there seldom, however, for he made friends of greater value than the Rambouillet and Scudéri circles, now in their decline. He became known to Madame de Sévigné, to Madame de la Fayette, to Rochefoucauld, Lamoignon, Racine, Molière, Chapelle, and La Fontaine. His friendship with Racine was especially tender and devoted, lasting a whole lifetime without a cloud. For Boileau, who had no place in his heart for the love of women, could yet—it is the one soft point in his character—be the truest of friends. Had he been Paris, he would have adjudged the apple by rules of art, and after careful tape measurements of the goddesses. But to Damon he was another Pythias, to Jonathan another David.

The death of his father giving him a modest patrimony, Boileau henceforth lived the life of a scholar,

chiefly among a small circle of friends. He rented a room in the Rue du Vieux Colombier, where, with Racine, La Fontaine, Molière, and Chapelle, weekly réunions and dinners were held and literary matters discussed. The little circle[1] consisted of men who had all made their *débuts* in the world. La Fontaine, by his Tales; Racine, by his "Thébaïde;" Molière, already well known; Chapelle, by his "Voyage;" and Boileau, by his Satires. The penalty for an infraction of the rules was nothing less than the perusal of so many verses of the "Pucelle;" the highest penalty—we hope, never inflicted—was the compulsory reading of a whole page. At these meetings, little by little, the literary creed which we find promulgated in the "Art Poétique," was discussed and formularized. They held the same views of art; they assisted each other in carrying them out, and in laying down their principles.

Not slowly, but rapidly, the name and influence of Boileau grew. To understand the weight of his opinion, it is not enough to read the Satires; these only prove it, they do not explain it. We must remember that there was as yet no criticism. A few poets and a few people with literary taste met at the Hôtel de Rambouillet, or that of Mlle. de Scudéri. These circles, beginning with excellent aims, rapidly degenerated into prejudiced *coteries*. Literature, to be sure, was always discussed, but on false principles of art. Then, too, as we have seen, a knot of third-rate poets had got themselves constituted an Academy, but it took many years before the French Academy became

[1] It is spoken of by La Fontaine, in the "Amours de Psyché." The four friends were Molière, who is called Gelaste (γελαστός); Boileau, Ariste; Racine, Acante; and La Fontaine, Polyphile.

a literary power. There were as yet no reviewers, nothing to guide popular opinion. Just as an unlearned listener at a concert likes or dislikes a piece of music, so the Parisians liked or disliked a new poem, tickled with a new melody, pleased and surprised by a novel collocation of words. But with no principles or rules of art and taste.

And as for the literature itself, it was as wild and unregulated as might have been expected. In wandering down one of those ravines which cut up a tropical island into sectors of splendour separated by rays of glory, you will mark as you step along the boulders amid which the mountain stream bubbles and sparkles, the palms spreading out broad branches, pointing skyward each its single spiral spear; beside these the great tree fern, beneath which the leaves appear by day a golden fretwork wrought for Solomon's Temple, and by night, under the moon, a marvellous pattern of lace cut out in silver. Round your feet spring up the scentless flowers of the forest; the bamboo is over your head, clustering together its long thin arms for protection against the wind; the aloe shoots thirty feet into the air, its long mast laden with its bitter berries. All at first seems the glorious, wanton prodigality of Nature which cannot exhaust her types of beauty. But as you go on, you may mark how the great creepers stretch their murderous embrace from tree to tree, crushing out their lives, so that the dead trunks killed long before their time stand up among the rest; at every step your foot plunges into what appears to be a solid bank of moss-grown earth and is a rotten and corrupting trunk; on the trees are vast ant-houses, where the little creatures live until their host is eaten up; death, premature decay, blighted promise, cross you at every step; in the

branches the hideous monkey lives, and chatters, and leaps; and runs. And there are no sweet birds because this creature of mischief, this fittest emblem of the flesh and its selfish appetites, has sucked all their eggs and destroyed all their nests. The literature of France at this time was like the tropical ravine, as full of promise and power, as full of death, decay, and blighted hopes; the sweet fancies of innocence and youth destroyed by licence and by lust.

We have seen how the lives of some of the men I have spoken of were licentious and disgraceful. What I have kept in the background is the way in which their lives re-acted upon their work—

> Le vers se sent toujours des bassesses du cœur.

There is nothing in all literature so disgraceful—let me say it for once and have done with it—as the *galant* verse of the seventeenth century. As a punishment its writers, save when one delves and digs in obscure places, are all forgotten, with their works—

> Ces dangereux auteurs,
> Qui, de l'honneur en vers infâmes déserteurs,
> Trahissant la vertu sur un papier coupable,
> Aux yeux de leurs lecteurs rendent le vice aimable.

But in their time they were read, learned, quoted. They corrupted the sacred sources of love, honour, self-restraint; they made mirth ghastly, hideous, harmful; they changed the laugh of childhood to the leer of Silenus; they took the blush from woman's cheek, the dignity from manhood. It was one of the two Herculean tasks undertaken by Boileau, to stop this foul and fetid stream. The second, which was a harder and fiercer fight, was to substitute good taste for bad, proportion for disproportion, harmony for cacophony. The

wretched taste of the poetasters, headed by Chapelain, seems almost inconceivable. It had grown up along with a habit of praising each other, till real criticism was regarded as a mark of ill-breeding. Chapelain himself, with his eternal "Cela n'est pas méprisable," was called by Voiture, "l'excuseur de toutes les fautes." Costar was supposed not to know the use of the word "no;" they were all so greedy of praise that to get it they grudged not the most extravagant compliments to each other. Words were no longer, as a writer complained, the signs of judgment and reason, but of a civility which one man pays to another like a salutation. Their style—I am not now talking of Voiture, Benserade, or Saint Amant, but of the prose writers—was made up of conceits the most far-fetched, the most wearisome, the most *fade*.[1]

The romance writers and the poets not only protected and praised each other, they were protected by great and powerful nobles, by the Prince de Condé, by Colbert, by the king himself until he learned better. They had the prestige of court patronage; they were the servants, dependents, parasites, of all that was rich and powerful in France.

Boileau appeared among them more as a critic than a poet. He came with a mission to silence them all,

[1] Take this as a specimen. The author wants to tell us of the arrival of the summer by the constellation of the Bull and the Twins. "After that the Knight of the Day, in the celestial amphitheatre, mounted on Phlegon, has valiantly speared the luminous Bull, throwing rays of gold for javelins, and having for applauders of his attacks the charming assembly of stars, who, in order to regard with more pleasure his elegant shape, were leaning on the balconies of Aurora; after that, by a singular metamorphosis, with spurs of feathers and a crest of fire, the fair-haired Phœbus, become a cock, has presided over the multitude of brilliant stars, hens of the celestial fields," &c.

and to lay down anew the rules of poetical art. These rules he arrived at by no instinct of his own, but by the application of common-sense to the rules of Horace. These at least were the laws of good taste, laws which ought to be part of our nature; laws as inscrutable as those of proportion and harmony. He would make them known, not by translation, but by imitation; he would apply an Horatian analysis to the writers of his own time; he would illustrate it by Satires and Epistles of his own, imitated directly as to form, spirit, and almost as to words, from those of Horace and Juvenal, those things only being changed which must be changed.

There was no hurry in his movements. When he had written a piece he kept it in his desk polishing and correcting till he could think of nothing more to add. Then he gave it to Racine for his criticism and suggestions. Perhaps, too, he showed it to Molière. Always the *limæ labor et mora*. The satire finally finished, it was not, as is our hasty and ill-considered practice, immediately set up in type and published, but was first carefully copied and handed about. Paris fought for copies; they were learned by heart; they were written down by memory and sent into the country as precious things, and long before they were printed the lines had become proverbs, and the unfortunates satirized were mere objects of contempt.

Boileau had thus a giant's strength. He used it with generosity, forbearance, and wisdom. No personal malice or ill-nature corrupts his satire. In every single case his verdict has been endorsed by posterity. Not one of all the poets whom he ridiculed has survived, not because Boileau held him up to contempt, but because he deserved oblivion at least for the things which Boileau ridiculed. St. Amant's "Moses Saved" is long

ago "Moses Lost." Chapelain's "Pucelle" was dead and buried as soon as born. The others are but shadows, the shadows of names. We have forgotten that people once ran after them pointing with the finger and crying aloud to the four winds their glory and immortal fame.

His power was increased by his position at court. He was thirty-three when he was presented to the king, two years younger than himself, and not yet quite spoiled by adulation. Boileau, at this first interview, by the king's request, recited him those well-known verses, which were not yet published, from the "Épître au Roi." Louis' face changed. He could not conceal his pleasure at flattery so undisguised, so audacious, and so gracefully set. "I would praise you more," he said, "had you praised me less." Boileau left the palace that day with a pension of two thousand francs for himself, and one for Racine of four thousand. Henceforth, Boileau is the official literary adviser of the crown. Whom he praises, Louis praises. If Louis ventures on an opinion contrary to his own, Boileau, always with his head erect (the man who flatters best is he who flatters as if the truth were extorted from him) dares to tell the king that he is admirable in sieges, but not so good as himself at sonnets. In the art of adulation Boileau was not only easily, incomparably first, but he also struck out a quite original line for himself. It is indicated above. He set up the king as a mighty conqueror—a second Alexander; he claimed for himself the proud position of celebrater of the king's triumphs. When he and Racine were with Louis at the siege of Ghent, a cannon-ball fell within a few yards of the king, and not many from where Racine and Boileau were standing. "Were you frightened?" asked the king, kindly. Of course *he* was no more

frightened than Julius Cæsar would have been under similar circumstances. An unready man would at once have disclaimed the imputation of cowardice. Not so Boileau. He magnified the danger by insinuation. He claimed for himself the usual amount of courage by insinuation. He conveyed to the king, by insinuation, the assurance that he—Louis—was as superior to ordinary mortals in bravery as he was by position. "I trembled for myself, sire, but I trembled more for your majesty."

Observe, too, that Boileau's flattery, like that of all the writers of the time, has a strong element of sincerity in it. It was a new thing to have a king who reigned and ruled as well. Richelieu and Mazarin, and before them the great lords, had accustomed the French to regard divided authority, with a puppet for a king, and all its attendant miseries of faction and tyranny, as a necessary evil. For the first time since Louis XI. here was a king who ruled by no great minister; who conducted his wars in person, or at least seemed to do so to the outer world; who was affable and courteous, who loved arts and literature. Therefore, when all men united in praising such a king it was from their heart. They meant it. It was not in nature to regard with other feeling than that of profound admiration a monarch who not only respected literature, but rewarded it by substantial pensions. Honour and a pension together naturally induced reverence for the fountain of honour. Personal loyalty may thus be in a way an indirect function of personal vanity, and the surest friends of the king are certainly those whose personality the king has recognized. For these reasons I am not disposed to sneer at Boileau for his adulation; rather to admire him for doing it so well.

He did it, as I have said, with a proper sense of his own importance. The king showed him once some verses of his own composition. "Nothing," said the critic, "is able to deter your majesty; you have wished to make bad verses, you have made them." He even ventured in the presence of the king to speak with contempt of Scarron, the first husband of Madame de Maintenon. And yet this was the same man who glosses over the inaction of the king during the passage of the Rhine, saying how Louis

Se plaint de sa grandeur qui l'attache au rivage.

On another occasion, the Duke de la Feuillade meeting Boileau at Versailles, showed him a sonnet by Charleval. Boileau read it, and gave it back with a disparaging remark. The duke showed it to the Dauphine, who looked it over and returned it, saying, "Voilà un beau sonnet." "There," said the duke, "the king likes it and the princess likes it." "The king," said Boileau, "is very good at taking towns; the princess is a lady of infinite accomplishments; but allow me to say that I know verses better than either of them." The duke hastened to tell the king. "What does your majesty think of such insolence?" "I am sorry to say," said Louis, "that I think Boileau is quite right."

He first received permission to print in 1666. He had already written his "Héros des Romans," of which I propose to speak further on; but out of consideration for Mlle. Scudéri, he refused to publish it in her lifetime. It was printed in Holland as the work of St.-Évremond.

It was in 1677 that he was made, with Racine, "historiographer" to the king. Neither of them ever wrote any history; and it was not till 1687 that he was

elected a member of the Academy, not at his own wish, but by the wish of the king. He made a very fine speech on the occasion, which the Academicians hardly knew whether to regard as real or satirical, for he told them that he supposed his election to be due to the fact that being appointed royal historiographer, the king wanted him to take the advice of the Academy.

All the stories told of him—they are as many as those told of Dr. Johnson—illustrate his constant devotion to the one object of his life—the improvement of good taste. With this end he taught the very wholesome doctrine that morality, public and private, is a necessary element in art. Thus he objected to the constant love-making of the opera, with its eternal refrains—

Il faut aimer,
Il faut s'enflammer;
La sagesse
De la jeunesse
C'est de savoir jouir de ses appas—

and would have preferred the chorus of antiquity:

Ille bonis faveatque et consilietur amicis,
Et regat iratos, et amet peccare timentes.

Yet it was only by certain points that the Latin spirit seized his mind at all. Terence he felt and appreciated; Horace as a satirist, but not as a lyrist; while Virgil, Catullus, Ovid, were nothing more than names to him. And it illustrates his habit of grasping the satiric point that he conceived the idea of writing a life of Diogenes, "whom I will make a model of the most perfect *gueuserie*. . . . . Nobody in the world had more *esprit;* he did from vanity what Socrates did from philosophy, an ingenious copyist trying to outdo the original. Socrates had a house; Diogenes had a tub; Socrates had a

wife; Diogenes got along without one; Plato used to say that Diogenes was Socrates gone mad."

He is careful to restrain his Pegasus, by observing strictly his own rule—"tout ce qu'on dit de trop est fade et rebutant"—till the poor animal is as quiet as a parson's cob, and ambles along at a measured pace while the satirist on his back pours out his general commonplaces enlivened by their strokes of delicious personalities.

Do you, reader, like Boileau's satires? Do you, indeed, like anybody's satires? Does your heart, like mine, sink when the poet assumes the pose of virtuous indignation, and begins his dialogue with the usual platitude? "Man is the most foolish of animals," cries Boileau. Quoth the other locutor—the dummy who is always being bowled over, like the infidel every Sunday—"Do I understand you aright, great Despréaux! you actually assert, in that brilliant and original remark, that man is more foolish than the brute creation?" "I mean it," returns the satirist, solemnly—

> Voilà l'homme en effet. Il va du blanc au noir;
> Il condamne au matin ses sentiments du soir,—

and so on. How we know the stale old tune, set to every barrel organ: man is inconstant, fickle, changeable; he is a slave to his passions, to his position; unlike the animals, who eat each other up in happy freedom, he makes laws for protection. The bigger the fool the wiser he thinks himself; with the rest of it. Then we have trotted out again the old classes: our friends the miser, the soldier panting for glory, the pedant, the gallant, the bigot, the libertine, the gambler, the prodigal, with Chapelain and Cotin lugged in to give point to it all.

Then comes, of course, the goody about true nobility, which is done just as well by Jean de Meung; the bore, the banquet, the sham miseries of those who make verses, the wretched necessity which makes the writer a satirist. We know all the second-hand properties and old stage tricks; we only wink at each other when the satirist asks what he is to do at Rome, being unable to lie; we grin when he deplores the vices of women; we get up and go away softly when the old familiar indignation has gone on too long. Surely, the days of the Horatian satire are over at last.

You may read, however, one of Boileau's with pleasure. It is the "Embarras de Paris." Imitation as it is, there is life, movement, vigour, in the descriptions; you hear the cats all night, the carts all day; the lackeys fight in the streets, the tiles fall off the roofs, the mud pours down the gutter. Then you may read some of the "Lutrin," if you like. I do not like. To the "Rape of the Lock" it is as the gambols of a clown to the dance of a fairy. Who can possibly take any interest in the great fat canons?

But the most sparkling, the most *clever*, of Boileau's works is the "Héros des Romans." Here he parodies, with a lightness of touch which he shows nowhere else, the Scudéri literature and the little literary fashions of the day. There is Horatius Cocles, singing to the tune of "Toinon la belle Jardinière,"

> Et Phénisse même publie
> Qu'il n'est rien si beau que Clélie—

a verse which Diogenes, who is there too, engrossed with the new-fashioned trifles of the day, explained after the manner of Mlle. Scudéri: "Phénisse is one of the most gallant and most *spirituelle* ladies in Capua,

but she has too great an opinion of her own beauty, and Horatius Cocles rallies her in this impromptu, making her confess that everything gives way to the beauty of Clélie." The Grand Cyrus is there: he does nothing but weep for his lost Mandane, till Pluto drives him away in a rage. At the news of an insurrection in Hades, Clélie is only terrified lest they should invade the *Royaume du Tendre*. Lucretia is occupied on a kind of anagram, invented by the great Brutus; while Sappho does nothing but draw portraits. One of them is given. It is exactly in the style of the portraits in the "Grand Cyrus." These were all, of course, flattering.

Tisiphone is naturally above the average stature of her sex, but nevertheless is so *dégagée*, so free, and so well proportioned in all her limbs, that even her great height sits well upon her—she has small eyes, but they are piercing, full of fire, and are bordered besides with a kind of vermilion which wonderfully enhances their splendour. Her hair falls naturally in ringlets, and one could almost say that these are so many serpents twisting in and out and playing carelessly about her face. Her complexion has not the faded and insipid colour of the Scythian women, but rather partakes of that noble and masculine brown imparted by the sun to the ladies of Africa. Her step is extremely noble and haughty: when it is necessary to hasten it she flies rather than walks, and I doubt whether Atalanta herself could outstep her. For the rest, this virtuous maiden is naturally an enemy of vice, especially of great crimes, which she pursues everywhere, torch in hand, and never leaves to repose; seconded in this by her two illustrious sisters, Alecto and Megæra, who are no less enemies of vice than herself: and one might say of these three sisters that they were morality personified and living.

Who would recognize in this description the features of the Fury of Orestes with her blood-stained eyes and snaky tresses?

A suspicion, to be discarded at once, crosses the irreverent mind, that Boileau remembered in drawing Tisiphone, that poor Mlle. de Scudéri—Sappho—was

herself the plainest of her sex; uglier, it was said, though this must have been exaggeration, than any man except Pellisson, her lover, of whom we have heard before. Boileau certainly allows himself to say so, in rhymes which are as impertinent as most epigrams:—

La figure de Pellisson
Est une figure effroyable:
Mais quoique ce vilain garçon
Soit plus laid qu'un singe et qu'un diable,
Sapho lui trouve des appas;
Mais je ne m'en étonne pas;
Car chacun aime son semblable.

Boileau might have remembered his own maxim: "Rien n'est beau que le vrai." One hopes that poor Sappho never saw the epigram.

The grand literary event of his later years was the part he took in the dispute as to the relative merits of the ancients and moderns. Charles Perrault, known now as the author of the "Contes des Fées," was the first to strike the signal of revolt against the classical despotism. It would be too tedious, here, to follow the dispute; to tell all the arguments used on both sides; to fight the dreary battle over again. In every age there is always some such question coming to the front to exasperate the combatants and bore the bystanders.

The reign of Boileau lasted all his life: his real power ceased in the year 1685, when he went to live at Auteuil. Here for nearly thirty years longer he lived by himself, occasionally going to town to the Academy, and receiving a few friends. One by one the old circle dropped and left him lonely. Racine died in 1699 in the arms of his old friend. "It is a happiness," he whispered with his last breath, "to die before you." Molière was dead twenty years before. La Fontaine

had gone in 1695; and when all were dead except himself, the old man, deaf, half blind, unable to speak above a whisper, full of pains and infirmities, sat down to wait his own turn, occupied meanwhile in correcting, and reading over and over again, his own poems. He added little to his fame in the last thirty years of his life, writing more satires and epistles, a very terrible ode after the manner of Pindar,[1] and the two last cantos of the "Lutrin." For him the age of great writers was gone. He felt as Ovid might have felt, had he returned to Rome and found himself alone, left the last of all the Augustan circle.

There could be no more great writers. France had exhausted her powers with the illustrious five of whom he was one—Corneille, Racine, Molière, La Fontaine, and Boileau. The soil was worn out by this supreme effort. Rest was absolutely necessary for France, perhaps a rest of many centuries. No more books for a very long time would be required. The other poets of his old age were ridiculous versifiers, even worse than those who went before him. The dramatists were creatures beneath contempt. "Do you want," he whispered savagely to an unfortunate playwright who brought him a MS., "do you want to hasten my last hour?" Yet the new generation went to Auteuil to look at him and to do him homage. The old man liked it; treated them politely, and ignored their writings.

As the end drew near he removed to Paris, where he died in 1711, with a last word of honourable pride. "It is a great consolation for a dying poet," he said,

[1] That is to say, as he expresses it, "full of movement and transport, wherein the mind seems hurried away by fury rather than guided by reason."

"to have never written a word against morality." He might have gone further—he might have consoled himself more with the reflection that he had also helped, by example and by precept, to keep others from so offending.

I find in Boileau the greatest master of the French language that the country had yet seen. Every word is the right one; every adjective is the right one; every sentence is in the best order possible: every rhyme is correct; every thought is fully expressed; and not a single line of his polished verses halts, stumbles, or runs lame. His satires are like a well ordered garden, smooth, trim, in perfect order. You look for the well-known flowers—they are all there. No wild flower, mark you, no weed, no flaunting hedge-side blossom; but—no new flower. We see everywhere the patient gardener, never tired of his labour, delighting in the work of his hand:—

> Dans ce rude métier où mon esprit se tue,
> En vain . . . . . je travaille et je sue.

As you wander about in this garden you become aware of a sense of fatigue. You yawn, you are oppressed, you seem to have seen it all before, and when you come out you feel as if you never want to go back again. I have recognized this feeling in every single writer on Boileau, even among those who have pronounced his *éloge*. Nobody wants to go back to him.

Presently we find that he has never conceived an original idea, never looked for one, never felt the necessity of thinking, save in grooves. Take from Boileau all that he has taken from Horace and Juvenal, and what have we left? A dummy of graceful form with a few rags fluttering in the wind. Take further what he has

pillaged from Regnier, and the very rags disappear. It was no robbery, in those days, to take from the classics. Everybody who could do it did it boldly and without shame. Perhaps, too, he thought that what he cribbed from Regnier he made his own by improving it.

The thing we miss, absolutely and entirely, is the poetic instinct.

Boileau is not a poet. He is an imitator of the very first order; he can write verses to dress up other people's thoughts in the smoothest and most workmanlike manner possible. I believe the art of sculpture may be reduced to mechanical skill, and what Canova has designed his workmen can execute. So it is with Boileau. He is a poetical workman who surpasses the whole world in mechanical skill. He is never wrong. You may entirely depend upon him. But he is not a poet. He has no eye for nature; those subtle analogies, those half shades of a dimly-felt relation between the outer and the inner world, which make up half the soul of a poet, are undreamed of by Boileau. In his country residence at Auteuil, where La Fontaine would have chirruped like a grasshopper among the blossoms, he sits gloomily thinking of days when he was not so deaf, and mute, and miserable, when dear Racine was living, when the weekly dinner in the Rue du Vieux Colombier was a present and glorious reality, and when he was able to flatter and please a king. For the best consolers of age bereaved and broken, are the spring and the sunshine, and the flowers; and Boileau felt them not. He has, besides, no sympathy with humanity; men and women are as if they did not exist. Books are everything—books and the art of making them. Kind and consistent friend as he was, there is not a line

in all his writings to prove that his heart ever beat for another. He does not praise the *dragonnades*, it is true; but he passes over without a tear the sufferings of the miserable people. He goes to the wars, and has no word for the wretchedness that war brings with it. He goes up and down the streets of a mighty city, but its pulse does not beat for him; the tide of its passions, its sufferings, its inarticulate moanings after better things, affect him not. He is cold, he is unmoved, he is only a *workman*. Nothing moves him. In the loveliest of chapels, in that perfect dream of architecture, the Sainte-Chapelle, he sees only the fat and greedy canons fighting over their stupid reading-desk. He is unaffected by the pomp of war; he is unmoved by music; women's eyes have no lustre for him; there is no trace of any love for children; there are no tears in the man; he has no weaknesses, no foibles, no pet sins,[1] hardly a single thing by which we can recognize him as one of ourselves. Now, most of us are happiest in the company of sinners.

But he reaches his own ideal. He shows the French how to make perfect verse—of a kind. He prepared the country for the reception of genius when genius should come. In Lamartine, in Alfred de Musset, we see the poet working with the tools of Boileau the versifier.

Even on his own narrow ground he has no enthusiasm; coldly, firmly, he lays down his rules, and judges his contemporaries by them. He is without elevation because he is without enthusiasm; he is with-

[1] He twice in his life got drunk; is once said to have danced; once showed considerable powers as a mimic; and once went, I am sorry to say, with Racine, to call on La Champmeslé. But what is this, in a life of seventy years?

out enthusiasm because he is a slave to his rules. He is like a canal, of uniform width and regulated depth, and just as a canal might do, he is for ever heaping derision and contempt on those licentious and self-willed rivers which have no law but their own fancy, and run as deep as they please and as broad as they please.

I have said above what was his mission in life. It remains to say that he did his work with a thoroughness which left nothing to desire. The luxurious lawlessness which allowed a Théophile to run riot, and made the pre-Boileau literature a wild field, grown over with weeds and encumbered with filth, was effectually and completely checked. That was alone a grand achievement. And for a hundred years the literary influence of Boileau kept French poetry within his limits, narrow but wholesome, of form, of thought, of expression.

After all, to have done a great work in one's generation, sensibly to have improved manners, without contradiction to have advanced the great cause of order, civilization, culture—is not this the very highest form of glory? Who, beside this great and splendid crown, which is undoubtedly due to our Nicolas, will compare the crown which he so ardently desired, of true and immortal poet? As for that, he actually had all the consolation which the latter crown can give, because he wore it in fancy on his brows. Men there are in every age who go about adorned with this imaginary coronet. It makes them happy; it adds to their real worth by magnifying their self-conceit; it gives brightness to their days, dignity to their step, the carefulness of pride to the goings of their feet. The cause is but a copy of verses, perhaps, in a Poet's Corner, but it is enough. Surely, of all blessed gifts the most blessed

is the gift of self-respect—conceit, assurance. Lord, make our boys conceited!

It is the quality which I most admire in Boileau. He steps to the front at once—ætat. twenty-four—and stands there as if he were in his right place, and knew it. From that position he issues decrees, judges his elders, including big brother Gilles, and condemns his contemporaries. Nobody tries to pull him down, nobody disputes his right to be there. So grand with it too. He concedes to the king his claim to be another Alexander of Macedon; but in matters of verse the king must give way to him. Nothing more delightful to contemplate than the magnificent air of this perruked dictator of good taste; nothing more comic, if it were not a little sad, than to see how the poor creatures whom he ridicules creep back to their ignoble cells and die of a broken heart. Like the pigs—I mean no disrespect, though the pig's exterior has not received the attention given to some animals—like the German swineherd's pigs, they tremble if the whip is raised, they scream if it is in the air, they are crushed if it fall upon their back. The whip falls but seldom, and only on the incorrigible, for Boileau is a good-natured dictator. Yes, next to his self-respect I admire his admirable good nature. Read the savage lines of glorious John when he happens to have a difference of opinion with any one. Read the spiteful lines of ill-natured Pope when he wants to say a nasty thing, and then read Boileau and mark the difference.

In most men's letters will be found some hint, if not a clear revelation, of the real man's nature. Not so in those of Boileau. The pedantry of style affects them all; he writes as if he knew they were to be shown about; he writes, however, of the things nearest his

heart. These are, first, the literary topics of the day, the merits of an imitation, the turning of a phrase, and the affairs of Versailles. Now and then, but to Racine only, he writes of himself, but not often enough to give us the sympathy for him and his troubles which we can feel for those who tell their friends all their troubles. It is all because he was a solitary child and a solitary man. He was deficient in that great quality, the capability of love, which mostly binds us all together, and makes us sensitive to the sufferings, the hopes, the disappointments and the joys of men and women, boys and girls. In spite of all he was an unselfish man, a generous man, charitable, compassionate, good-natured, a master of language, of keen if narrow intellect, and of perfect taste. But—HE WAS NOT A POET.

Chapter XV.

MOLIÈRE.

"He the best player!" cried Partridge. "Why, I could act as well as he myself. In that scene where you told me he acted so fine, why, Lord help me, any man would have done exactly the same."—Fielding.

O," said grandfather Cressé to little Jean-Baptiste Poquelin; "go to the Hôtel de Bourgogne. There, at least, you will be out of mischief." The boy went, and that was the beginning of all the mischief, for the dramatic faculty of Molière was first awakened by those boyish visits to the play.

By this time, the French drama, of which I have as yet said nothing, having got well out of the "Ferrex and Porrex" school was going through those successive steps of development which belong to the history of the modern stage in every country. The mysteries and moralities, the farces and sottises, which had delighted Villon and Marot were at last finished and put away, and the Confrérie de la Passion, a brotherhood which had lasted for a hundred years and more, finally handed over their hôtel to the new comedians in 1588,

and after enjoying the rents in peace for forty years, at last had even these taken away from them and were finally abolished.

To be sure they died hard, and made as good a fight as could be expected of people whose very bread depended on the maintenance of their popularity. The first blow at the old order of things was struck in 1552, when Jodelle produced his famous classical tragedy of "Cleopatra," after the model of Seneca's plays. It was acted before Henry II. and all his court at Rheims, by the poet himself and his friends the scholars and poets of the Pleiad. The king congratulated the author, and gave him 500 crowns, after which, Ronsard, Baïf, Rémi, Belleau, and La Péruse went with Jodelle to Arceuil, where, after the manner of the ancients, and brimful of classical ardour, they offered the poet a he-goat crowned with flowers. In the same year, Jodelle wrote his "Dodo" and his "Eugène," a tragedy and a comedy. The *Confrères*, seriously alarmed at the success of the new drama, made desperate efforts to regain their position. First and foremost, Jodelle must be accused of atheism. A man, indeed, who had consented to the sacrifice of a he-goat could be nothing but an atheist. Ronsard answered the charge, denying the sacrifice, and Jodelle, who wrote no more plays, became, after he had spent the five hundred crowns with Lesbia and Lalage, quite after the manner of the ancients, a drunken hanger-on at court, arranging ballets and *divertissements* of all kinds for the king, dying in great misery and poverty at the age of forty. The poverty of Jodelle did the Confrères no harm, but the growing taste for learning and their own dulness killed them. It was in vain that the morality became more moral, for the people would not return to their

old paths. Where one devil was formerly held up to ignominy on the stage, now two, four, even eight—just as we sometimes see two or even three clowns in a pantomime—capered, played their tricks—these all stale and threadbare—and were brought to confusion. But it was too late; the more devils there were the more the people yawned; and the brotherhood, who knew very well that the Parisian's yawn is as fatal to a drama as the Roman's thumb was to a gladiator, perceived with anguish that a snug and lucrative family business was gone to pieces, and that the mediæval drama was really done and ended.

During Molière's boyhood there were three theatres in Paris, for the company at the Confrères' old theatre, the Hôtel de Bourgogne, grew so popular that it was found necessary to divide it into two and establish a new theatre, that of the Marais; both of these theatres acted under license and with privilege. In addition to them was the Italian company, which played at the Hôtel de Petit Bourbon. And besides these, Richelieu, himself, as we know, an aspirant for dramatic glory, caused two theatres, one of which held two thousand spectators, to be built in his own palace, to which the public were not admitted.

At the Italian house the pieces were principally impromptu farces, in which the plot of the piece, probably also some of the dialogue, was first carefully put together, and every incident assigned to its proper act and scene, while the words were supplied by the actors themselves, who trusted to their mother-wit to help them through. The best actor among them called himself Arlequin, a name assumed by him out of gratitude to his patron, the great and good Achille de Harlay—he is almost forgotten now, but was in his day a foremost

man in France[1]—a man so loyal that his heart was said to be sown with *fleurs-de-lis*. It seems a strange irony of fate, that the name of so eminent and good a man should now survive only in that of Arlequin's lineal descendant, the pantomime man with the mask and lath. Of Arlequin's ready wit many stories are told. Being asked, for instance, of what disease his father had died, he said it was of grief, "at seeing himself hanged." And one day in a very thin house, Columbine whispering a secret to him: "Speak up," he said, "nobody will hear you." Of Arlequin, too, is told that celebrated and well-worn story which belongs to the life of every comic actor. "Go and see Arlequin," the doctor told him, "he will cure you." "Alas!" cried the unfortunate buffoon, "then I am a dead man, because I am myself Arlequin." After him came Scaramouche, whose real name was Fiorelli. This extraordinary being possessed the admirable power of boxing his own ears with his feet, and long after he was seventy years of age used to strike his audience with delight and awe by doing it. Molière, Ménage says, never missed an opportunity of going to see him.

As for the pieces performed by the French companies —those on which the mind of the future dramatist and actor was nurtured—they were principally the earlier plays of Corneille, with those of Rotrou, Quinault and Racan. Real comedy, as yet, was not in existence. Pastorals there were, and *bergeries*, graceful, pretty, and conventional, with broad and coarse farces, prodigal in situations if in nothing else, from which Molière might have learned the power of dramatic reality. Such

[1] Not that Harlay-Champvallon, Archbishop of Paris, of whom we shall hear something more farther on.

comedies as the boy would see at the Hôtel de Bourgogne were chiefly of the Spanish school, turning on intrigue and love quarrels, of which his own "Dépit Amoureux," or the *motif* of Horace's "Donec gratus eram tibi" is a favourable example. Corneille's "Mélite" was already on the stage, and Alexandre Hardy, who encumbered the literature of his age by some hundreds of comedies, of which not one survives, and who once composed, wrote, and put on the stage a five-act play in three days, was the stock author of comedy. And his plays, neither satirical, nor real, nor moral, were dependent entirely on situations.

Low comedy, or rather buffoonery, was represented by an immortal trio of actors, rejoicing in the stage names of Gros Guillaume, Gaultier Garguille, and Turlupin. Rumour went that their greatness was achieved rather than born with them, and that in early life they had all three been adepts in the art and mystery of baking. In the intervals of kneading they developed, this wonderful triad of bakers, a talent for mimicry so prodigious that it could not be lost to the world; and so, yielding to the irresistible call of destiny, they stuck up a stage on trestles, where, with the aid of scenery rudely painted on old boat-sails, they began to make the Parisians laugh first at fair time, when all privileges and monopolies were suspended, and afterwards venturing to continue until they should be stopped by the law. They became so popular that the Hôtel de Bourgogne found them formidable competitors, and brought a formal complaint against them for unlicensed acting. Cardinal Richelieu heard the case; sent for them, made them act in his presence, and laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks; and though he forbade them to go on breaking the law he ordered

the Hôtel de Bourgogne to receive them in their company. "Your theatre is excessively dull," said the cardinal; "perhaps by the help of these men it will be a little more lively."

They composed their own pieces, would not allow any women to act with them, and, scorning the conventional dress of the stage, dressed exactly as seemed best to them. Gros Guillaume was an immensely fat man—so fat that he used two belts, which made him look like a walking cask. He wore no mask, as was the custom in comic acting (hence Harlequin's mask in our pantomime), but covered his face with flour. A melancholy solemnity accompanied and set off his acting, and a painful disorder to which he was subject sometimes seized him on the stage and caused tears of pain to rise into his eyes. The spectacle of real physical suffering in the midst of a farce was quite a new feature of comedy, and proved immensely successful. Gaultier Garguille was as thin as his colleague was fat. Nature, mindful of his destiny, had been bountiful indeed to him. An excessively long, lean body, supported by straight legs of attenuated proportions, but as supple as those of Scaramouche, terminated in a round red face, while his voice had a rich nasal twang. He generally took the parts of schoolmasters and pedants, and sang his own songs.

Turlupin—who, when he acted tragedy, took the name of Belleville—owed his celebrity, like Arlequin, to his powers of improvisation. The three acted together in an unbroken friendship for nearly fifty years; then, venturing to imitate a trick of gesture of a well-known magistrate, they fell into trouble. The other two escaped, but poor Gros Guillaume was too fat to run away and got caught. Put into prison, he was

seized with so terrible a fear that he incontinently expired, and his two comrades, preserving to the last a friendship worthy of being placed side by side with that of Damon and Pythias, both died of grief in the same week.

The costumes and scenery of the stage were effective enough, if simple. As the king's servants, the actors were obliged to follow the court; the scenery seems to have been painted on canvas, unrolled and hung up at the end of the hall. "Flies," or side-scenes, of course were impossible, because the sides of the stage were crowded with benches, occupied by those who could afford to pay for the privilege of sitting there. A change of scene, when required, could be easily effected by dropping another painted roll. Molière's plays, however, are generally written for a single scene, an interior, furnished. It is probable that in the private performances before the court, there was no stage at all, and the actors waited at the side till it was their turn to go on, when they crossed an imaginary line and were immediately supposed to be visible. Thus the "Bourgeois Gentilhomme" was first performed at the Château de Chambord, and the room shown there as the scene of the performance is clearly too small to admit of any but the simplest appliances. In front of the stage stretched the *parterre*, or pit, the admission to which was ten sous, till Molière raised it to fifteen. It had no seats or benches, everybody standing. Nor was it till 1782 that the Comédie Française, the mother of all stage improvements, introduced benches, and therefore quiet, into this noisy and turbulent area; while it was only in 1760 that they were enabled, at great pecuniary sacrifice, to get rid of the seats on the stage and have the boards entirely to themselves.

The dresses were, of course, quite conventional. An actor's theatrical wardrobe consisted *de rigueur* of an expensive suit in the richest fashion of the time. Richelieu, for instance, gave Bellerose a new suit for his part in "Le Menteur;" Molière presented Mondori, when he was in distress, with an acting dress; and actors are criticised for allowing care for their plumes to interfere with the fire of their acting. Certain marks of distinction were made. A hero or a king wore a laurel wreath in his wig; Molière's enemies declared that he carried a whole grove on his head. A warrior put on a cuirass; swords, of course, were worn; and it was not difficult te assume the appearance, when required, of an *exempt*, a magistrate, or a physician. Actresses, for their part, appeared in the richest dresses they could command, regardless of the parts they were to sustain. Absurdities and anachronisms of costume naturally occurred, but do not appear to have struck the audiences of the time as ludicrous. While, for instance, great Hector trod the boards in a cuirass and classic buskin, with a gigantic wig of the seventeenth century, it was fortunate if he did not think it due to his position to crown the perruque with a helmet, fondly supposed to represent the casque which fell by the banks of the Simois. Molière, who took things as he found them and was no reformer of stage accessories, cared little enough about such anachronisms. Probably he was as used to them as we are to the neat *brodequins* and bright dresses of those conventional village maidens, whom we gladly accept in place of the clodhopping wenches of our own secluded hamlets. Moreover, though one wonders how Psyché and Amour were dressed, most of Molière's plays belong to his own time. Racine tried to effect a reform, but no one seconded him; the great Baron him-

self played the part of Misael, in the "Maccabees," dressed as a Paris *bourgeois;* and when Hercules appeared on the stage it was in the coat and wig of the seventeenth century, while his strength was indicated by rolling back his cuffs, and a small log of wood on his left shoulder served to represent his club. Apollo, on the other hand, made his godhead apparent to all by wearing a yellow plate fixed conspicuously behind the left ear.

It was more than a hundred years later that a reform was really begun. In 1747 the Italian company acted a comedy, the scene of which was laid in Spain, in Spanish costume. In 1753 Madame Favart took the part of a village girl, dressed really *en paysanne;* and then, the thin edge of the wedge being introduced, reform went on merrily, till Talma put the *coup de grâce* to the old system at the end of the last century, and every actor began to study how best to dress his part.

To Molière's time, if not to his company, belongs the first attempt to raise the social status of actors. The earliest comedians, those who succeeded the Confrérie de la Passion, led lives of pure and unbridled licence. They enjoyed no social position, and obeyed no social law. Excommunicated by the church, they considered themselves freed from all restraints save those only imposed by the magistrates. They got their money freely and spent it carelessly. Hear what Molière says himself:—

Our profession is the last resource of those who can find nothing better to do, or of those who want to do no work. To go on the stage is to plunge a dagger into your parents' hearts. You think, perhaps, that it has its advantages. You are mistaken. We are, if you please, the favourites of the great, but we are also the slaves of their whims and caprices. . . . Whether we like it or not, we must march at the first order, and give pleasure to others, while we

are ourselves suffering from all kinds of vexation; we must endure the rudeness of those with whom we have to live, and compete for the good graces of a public which has the right of grumbling at us in return for the money which they give us.

Considering who and what the actors of the time were, it is not surprising that M. Poquelin *père*, most respectable of upholsterers, should object to his son's going upon the stage. It was not for this that he had sent him to the Collége de Clermont, to the lectures of Gassendi, and that he had regretfully consented to his giving up trade and going to the bar. Fate was too strong, and the only concession the old man could gain was that his son should change his name—a practice common enough among the actors then as now. But in becoming an actor, Molière did much to raise the character of the profession. In the first place, he had belongings. His father had not been hanged, as had happened to some actors. Next, he was a scholar and a lawyer. He had not been, as some comedians, a baker or a lackey or a prison-bird. No one could bring up disagreeable antecedents against him. He was also a servant of the crown, being one of the king's *valets de chambre*. Again, he was a special favourite and *protégé* of the king, who took delight in showing him favour, and protected the profession by declaring it in no way derogatory to a gentleman to become an actor. And his writings helped. An actor who was also a scholar; a comedian who was an author and the friend of Boileau and La Fontaine; a player who held his own among courtiers and was a favourite with the king; a man who could make a house hold their sides with laughing, who yet was not a drunken profligate, but lived reputably; the leader of a theatrical company who yet set himself up as a satirist and a *censor morum*:

this was a new thing in the land, and was accepted first with astonishment and secondly with respect. For the rest, an actor's life then was much the same as it is now. Favourites were recognized; *débutants* were received with hesitation; it took time to make a mark, and success was often a lottery. There was a spice of danger, belonging naturally to a time when the pit was filled with armed men always ready for a row. Once, for instance, when the king took away from his musketeers and gentlemen of the guard the privilege of free admission, there was a kind of O. P. riot. The excluded soldiers, by way of asserting their rights, came in a body to the theatre, and after murdering the porter, rushed into the house with the intention of sacrificing all the comedians. Actors and actresses scuttled off in wild terror. Béjart, the younger, who happened to be dressed as an old man, appeased the tumult by hobbling on the stage and imploring the mob at least to spare the life of an old man who had but a few days left. Then Molèire, the persuasive, addressed them in honeyed words, and convinced them of their unreason. Nothing seems to have been said about the unfortunate porter. One of the actors in his terror endeavoured to escape through a window too small for him. He got his head and shoulders through, but the rest of him refused to follow, and he stuck there, screaming in an agony of terror lest some unfair advantage should be taken of his position, till his friends released him by taking out a bar.

But let us leave the theatre, and turn to our author. He was born at Paris on the fifteenth day of January, 1622, the eldest of ten children; his father and relations being respectable *bourgeois*, connected with upholstery, tapestry, and so forth; his father being also *valet de*

chambre in the royal household. Young Jean-Baptiste received the best education possible at the Collége de Clermont, and afterwards followed the courses of the illustrious Gassendi, with whom he had for fellow-students Chapelle, Bernier, Hesnault, and Cyrano de Bergerac, among others. He here imbibed a profound respect for Lucretius, whom he tried to translate, when he began to study law as a profession. But all his earlier projects were thrown to the winds when he took to acting. For while frequenting the courts he frequented the theatre as well, and at length joined a band of young men, students chiefly, like himself, with whom he acted for pleasure at first, at fair time, the company being known by the name of "l'Illustre Théâtre." They held together for a year or two, when the troop was broken up, and Molière, with the Béjarts and a few more, set off on a journey, which was destined to last for twelve years, through the provinces as professional actors. And before taking the decisive step of adopting the stage as a profession, the young man changed his name, and was henceforth known as Molière. Why he took that name, or where he found it, I do not know;[1] but from the age of twenty-two the name of Poquelin belonged to him no more. Arouet and Poquelin,—they are *bourgeois* names which convey no meaning to most people; and very likely the stocks still exist in France, producing respectable and godly people. By what freak of nature does a family, otherwise commonplace and level, suddenly push forth one shoot which is to be a glory to the whole world, and then never distinguish itself again?

[1] There was a French poet of that name who died about the year of Molière's birth. Perhaps he was known to some of the Poquelin family.

The change of name is significant. It marks, first, obedience to a custom which has more or less prevailed to the present day—a custom which ought to be discontinued, if only because it springs originally from contempt of an actor's calling. But it shows also how, in taking a step which seemed then to condemn him, in the eyes of respectability, to social infamy, young Poquelin broke voluntarily with the whole of his family. Henceforth we never hear of them in connection with him at all. They were strangers to him. They have another name. No doubt it was shame and grief to them to see the vagabond actor come back to Paris, after his Odyssean wanderings, and become at once the favourite of the court. We can imagine his brothers and cousins agreeing never to mention his name. In the family *réunions* his place is filled up by another. There is, of course, no idea that he has achieved a greatness which upholstery could never convey. Even if this were so, we may fancy them solemnly shaking their heads, and agreeing that solidity of purse, after all, forms the best basis for reputation. Perhaps they were right. It *is* better to be comfortable, to work little, to live well, to have your neighbour's esteem, than to fight like a gladiator for the world's applause. It is better, in the autumn of your days, to retire to a suburban villa, and bask in the sun, at peace with all mankind. We have but one life in this world, and there is plenty to be said in favour of making it comfortable.

So Molière set forth on his appointed tour with his friends the Béjarts, of whom more presently. This part of his life, the most obscure because only a few traces of him can be discovered here and there, was perhaps the happiest. He was young, successful so far,

ambitious; and, going about with his comedians from place to place, noted silently, in his undemonstrative way, the manners and talk of the people. A silent man, one who would sit at a window and listen, and watch the ways of the folk. At Pézénas they used to show the chair, in a barber's shop, where he would sit for hours, saying nothing, so that his taciturnity was proverbial. Boileau afterwards called him "le contemplateur," while Molière himself alludes to this habit of his with a certain grim humour in the "Critique de l'École des Femmes:"—

> You know the man and his indolence as regards conversation. She invited him simply on a visit, and he never appeared so stupid as among half-a-dozen people whom she had asked, as a great favour, to meet him. They stared at him as if he was unlike any other man. They thought he was there to amuse the company with *bons-mots:* that every word from his lips would be something strange: that he would make impromptus on all that was said, and would call for wine with an epigram. He deceived their expectations by his silence, and the lady was ill-satisfied with her experiment.

The way of travelling of a strolling company is described by Scarron in the opening chapter of the "Roman Comique:"—

> It was towards the evening when a cart, drawn by four lean oxen, led by a brood mare whose colt was capering round and round the cart, like a little fool that it was, slowly entered the town. The cart was full of coffers, trunks, and great packets of painted canvas, on the top of which sat a lady dressed in a costume partly of the country, partly of the town. Beside the cart walked a young man who had on breeches like those worn by comedians when they represent a hero of antiquity, and, in place of shoes, antique buskins mudded up to the ankles.

A third player follows, bearing a violoncello, and the rest of the troupe join them afterwards. In the evening, regrets are expressed that the actors are too few to perform a piece; and the young man tells them that

their paucity of numbers is no obstacle, because he can easily take three parts himself. Clothes are borrowed, and they begin to perform, when they are interrupted in the Scarronesque fashion, that is to say, by a quarrel and a free fight. Then that garrulous vagabond, d'Assoucy, tells how he met Molière, and went on with the company as far as Lyons.

It is said that the best man in the world gets tired of giving his brothers dinners after a month: but the players were more generous than any brothers, for they kept me at their table a whole winter. . . I never saw so much goodness, so much heartiness, so much honesty, as among these people, well worthy to represent in the world those princes and kings whom they personate every day on the stage.

In 1654 the Prince de Condé offered to make him his secretary, *vice* Sarasin, deceased. Molière had the good sense and the extraordinary good luck to refuse the post, although he was already past the period of early manhood, and as yet had made no mark. It was in 1658 that he returned to Paris, and then, through the good offices of the same prince, performed before the king in the "Nicomède" of Corneille, and received the royal license to establish his company in the theatre of the Hôtel de Petit Bourbon, under the title of the *Troupe de Monsieur*, every actor being entitled to a pension of 300 livres. It was here that for twelve years Molière's company played the pieces which their manager wrote for them, until his death put an end to their power of cohesion. Two or three years after that event they were amalgamated with the Hôtel de Bourgogne, which swallowed up, shortly afterwards, the Theatre of the Marais, and the Comédie Française grew up out of the three.

Molière was the stage-manager, principal partner, orator, author, and chief actor. As a manager, he

seems to have been despotic, arbitrary, and irritable. Off the stage the most gentle, tractable, and amiable of men: on it the most rigid and inflexible tyrant. The consequence was that his pieces were played with an attention and precision to which the Parisian stage had been previously a stranger. As an actor, he was the greatest artist of his time. "Molière was comedian from head to foot; it seemed that he had several different voices. Everything in him *spoke;* and with a step, a smile, a movement of the hand, a dropping of the eyelash, he imparted more ideas than the greatest talker would have managed to convey in an hour." He did not, however, always undertake the principal parts in his own plays; and while he was Alceste in the "Misanthrope," Jourdain in the "Bourgeois Gentilhomme," he was only Orgon in "Tartuffe."

The success of his company, which speedily eclipsed the other two, was due not only to the pieces they performed, but in a measure to the continued favour and protection of the king. I think indeed that, while it is the fashion to harp upon the unbounded egotism and selfishness of the *grand monarque*, too little justice is done him for the patronage he extended to men of letters and learning, and the freedom he allowed to them. We ought to remember the long list of poets and writers who shared the king's bounty and were put on his pension list. It was no slight stimulus to an author to feel that the king was taking an interest in his work, and that, though not without claims to critical ability, he was willing to defer his own judgment to the opinion of better critics. "Who," asked Louis once of Boileau, "is the greatest writer of the day?" "Sire, Molière." "I had not thought so," replied the king; "but you know more about those subjects than I do."

Enemies, envious of his fame, swarmed about the dramatist. Their accusations and scandals have nothing to do with us here. One charge, however, he admitted. He borrowed right and left—a "*grand et habile picoreur*," as Ménage calls him. The idea of "Les Précieuses Ridicules" is borrowed; Ninon de l'Enclos suggested that of the "Tartuffe;" a story of the Count de Grammont, that of the "Mariage Forcé;" and the plot of the "Malade Imaginaire" is taken from a mediæval Latin book called "Mensa Philosophica." Boileau, La Fontaine, Madame de la Sablière, even the king, suggested situations. Thus the famous phrase, "*Le pauvre homme!*" was used by the king. He once invited a certain ecclesiastic to supper. The reverend gentleman declined on the ground of religion, affirming that on fast days a single collation was all he allowed himself. One of the bystanders laughed; and, on the king asking the reason, he enumerated a long list of dishes by which the good man had mortified the flesh that day. At the mention of each *plat* the king exclaimed, "*Le pauvre homme!*"

Molière's own rivals were of course the bitterest against him. He replied to them much in their own coin, sparing none of the actors of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, except Floridor, the tragedian. The exception was, perhaps, politic, Floridor being a great favourite of the king's, and of a popularity too great for the public to allow any attack upon him. Perhaps, however, it was due to personal friendship. Floridor was worthy of the exception. Alone among actors, no scandal ever attached to his name. His morals were blameless; his acting was perfect; his life free from envy and malice, and his conversation from detraction and slander.

Foremost among the little troupe of which Molière was king is the name of Béjart. The family of Béjart consisted of two brothers, both conscientious, praiseworthy actors, and three sisters. The eldest was Madeleine, Molière's first flame (she was said to be secretly married to a gentleman of Avignon), the Dorine of his "Tartuffe," and, after the death of her brothers, the principal partner with Molière in the profits of the company. She was already past the bloom of her beauty when the troupe established themselves in Paris, and resigned the principal parts—certainly with regret, and probably with temper—to the younger members. Geneviève, the second, had no genius, and it is not clear that she kept the stage long. The youngest sister, Armande Élisabeth Gresinde, became Molière's wife.

With regard to the actors of the company, there was, first, Brécourt, who deserted them, and went to the Hôtel de Bourgogne. Here, performing the part of Timon in his own play with too great vehemence, he broke a blood-vessel and died in consequence. Apparently there was a good deal of bawling on the stage at the period, for Brécourt's manner of death was not singular. Montfleury, who was too fat for the part, killed himself by over-exertion in the part of Orestes; and Mondori, as we have seen above, got an apoplectic fit as Herod, and could act no more: "*Homo non periit, sed periit artifex*," was said of him. Brécourt created the part of Alain in the "École des Femmes." "This man," said the king, "would make the very stones laugh."

Beauval, who was born by nature and specially designed to act the part of Thomas Diafoirus in the "Malade Imaginaire," and nothing else; De Brie, whom Molière only tolerated for the sake of his wife; De Croisy, a gentleman by birth, and the original actor of

Tartuffe; L'Espy, the successor of Molière as the orator; Du Parc, called "Gros René;" and Le Noir de la Thouillière, who would have been a glorious actor of tragedy but for an unfortunate face, which spoiled all tragic effect by its irrepressible jollity, nearly make up the list of his actors. Only one more must be mentioned—the great, the illustrious Baron, Molière's pupil, the darling of the stage, and of half the fine ladies in Paris; the finest, the handsomest, and the vainest actor that Paris had ever seen. "A comedian," said Baron, "is brought up in the lap of kings. I have read all histories, ancient and modern. I find that nature has produced in every age a crowd of heroes and great men. Prodigal in every other respect, she has been niggardly in this alone, for I find only two great comedians, Roscius and MYSELF!"

He acted Mélicerte when he was only thirteen years old, but when Molière's wife boxed his ears he gave up the part and left the company in dudgeon. He came back at the age of eighteen, as handsome as an angel, and played Amour to Mlle. Molière's Pysché. There was no more boxing of ears between them, but, unfortunately, quite the contrary. Baron left the stage at the age of thirty, and returned to it again after thirty years' absence. His reputation had actually survived through a whole generation. He left it no more, playing better than ever until he died.

The actresses all bore the title of "Mademoiselle;" not that they were unmarried, but because in those days no *bourgeoise* was privileged to bear the title of "Madame." The most popular among the company of the Palais Royal was Mlle. De Brie. If Madeleine Béjart was his first love, the De Brie was certainly Molière's second. She was also the fourth, because

after the first rupture with his wife he returned to her to find in her society some alleviation from his domestic miseries. She first played the part of Agnes in the "École des Femmes," and was so popular in it that the public would have no one else so long as she lived; and she played it till the age of sixty-four. Like many actresses, she had the art of preserving her beauty, as an epigram written upon her testifies:—

> If her beauty, though fading, outrivals
> Our youngest and loveliest queen,
> Say, since she 's so charming at sixty,
> What must she have been at sixteen?

Molière's troubles in his efforts to keep the peace between Madeleine Béjart, Mlle. De Brie, and his wife were sometimes too much for his philosophy. Chapelle brought him comfort by comparing him to Jupiter, trying to keep his three goddesses in good temper, and referred him to Homer:—

> Your trouble is vain. Read the tale and reflect:
> The moral you cannot but see;
> It teaches the folly of men who expect
> That three women will ever agree.
> Take comfort by Homer's experience there,
> And own he is sanguine indeed,
> Who ventures in credulous confidence where
> Great Jupiter ne'er could succeed.

Mlle. du Parc, in her youth more beautiful than De Brie, excelled in dancing. She was the inventor of an attraction to the stage which we are too apt to think belongs to the moderns: "Elle faisait certaines cabrioles remarquables, et on voyoit ses jambes, au moyen d'une jupe qui étoit ouverte des deux côtés, avec des bas de soye." Mlle. Beauval, the first Nicole of the "Bourgeois Gentilhomme," was popular and

pretty, though the king disliked her voice. She enriched the state, if not her husband, by the production of four-and-twenty children. Mlle. De Grange was ugly and bad; Mlle. Beaupré was pretty and good; and De Croisy's wife and daughter, of whom there is nothing to say, make up the list.

Remains only Molière's wife.

This is her portrait, drawn by her husband:—

"Her eyes are small."

"True, they are small; but they are full of light, the brightest and most winning possible."

"Her mouth is large."

"Yes; but it has graces that you never see in any other mouth. The very sight of it inspires desire—it is the most attractive, the most lovable mouth in the world."

"She is not tall enough."

"No; but her carriage is easy and graceful."

"As for her wit—"

"She has plenty—the finest and most delicate."

"Her conversation—"

"Her conversation is charming."

"She is as capricious as possible."

"Well, I like a beautiful woman to be capricious. Her caprices become her."

Because little Armande had grown up under his own eyes, had been pleased by his kindness, had learned to look upon him as her best friend, and had run to him for help in all her childish troubles, he imagined that she would find it easy to love him. So practised an observer should have known that familiarity is the greatest enemy to love; that where there is no mystery, nothing unknown, there can be no room for the imagination; that gratitude makes a bad soil for the growth of love. He met with neither love nor gratitude, for the woman was worthless. She used her sweet voice and her winning ways to cajole her husband, and gave her affections to other men.

It is Chapelle who tells us Molière's own sufferings with his wife:—

"Have you ever loved any woman at all?" Molière asked me. "I have certainly been in love," said Chapelle, "but only as a man of sense ought to be." "Then," replied Molière, "you have never loved any one: you have mistaken the shadow of love for love itself. . . . I was naturally endowed with the greatest inclination to tenderness, and as I thought that my efforts might inspire in my wife those sentiments which time could not destroy, I spared no effort to succeed. As she was very young when I married her, I knew nothing of her vicious inclinations, and thought myself a little less unhappy than most of those who enter upon similar engagements. Therefore marriage did not cause me to relax in my attentions: but I found so much indifference in her that I begun to think all my care useless, and to perceive that what she felt for me was very far from what I had hoped. . . . I spared nothing at the first knowledge I had of her guilty passion for the count de Guichy to conquer my own feelings, seeing the impossibility of changing hers. I called to my assistance all that might help to console me. I considered her as a person whose one merit was her innocence: this gone, she had no other. I formed the resolution of living with her as an honest man may with a light-minded wife, one, that is, who is sufficiently persuaded that his reputation does not depend on her bad conduct. . . . But I found that a woman without much beauty, relying only on the intellect that I had trained in her, was able in an instant to destroy all my philosophy. Her presence caused me to forget all my resolutions, and the very first words she uttered in her own defence left me so convinced that my suspicions were ill founded that I asked her pardon for my credulity. . . . Everything in the world connects itself in my heart with her; the idea of her has so seized me that I can think of nothing in her absence which gives me the least pleasure."

Molière ventured to put his personal feelings even more plainly upon the stage. In the "Misanthrope" he gives to Célimène, *a part taken by his wife*, all her coquetry; and to Alceste, his own part, he assigns all the weakness of a man who endeavours in vain to combat a passion for an unworthy object. Did Mlle. Molière herself perceive what the story of their life makes so plain to us?

Non, l'amour que je sens pour cette jeune veuve
Ne ferme point mes yeux aux défauts qu'on lui treuve :
Et je suis, quelque ardeur qu'elle m'ait pu donner,
Le premier à les voir comme à les condamner.
Mais, avec tout cela, quoi que je puisse faire,
Je confesse mon faible ; elle a l'art de me plaire ;
J'ai beau voir ses défauts et j'ai beau l'en blâmer,
En dépit qu'on en ait elle se fait aimer,
Sa grâce est la plus forte ; et, sans doute, ma flamme
De ces vices du temps pourra purger son âme.

But Molière, as his friend Chapelle, not like St. Peter, "himself a married man," told him, was not the only great man unhappy in his wife.

It was true, but it brought no consolation. It soothes no unhappy man to reflect that others are more unhappy still. Other great men have been mated with worthless wives; none with a wife so worthless as Armande Béjart. Again and again Molière forgave her; but things could not always go on so, and they agreed at last to separate, living, however, under one roof. A year before Molière's death they were re-united, and a month before he died his wife gave him a child, which died in infancy. Perhaps had her husband lived longer, even this hard-hearted woman might have been touched by such continual kindness, such unmerited love.

His first great triumph was in 1659, when he put on the stage his "Précieuses Ridicules." The success of the play was undoubted from the first. "Courage, Molière," cried an old man from the pit, "this is real comedy." And Ménage, who was then with Chapelain, remarked, as they went out, "Monsieur, we have approved of all these absurdities which have just been criticised so finely and with such good sense. After this, as Saint-Rémi said to Clovis, we must burn what we have adored, and adore what we have burned."

Ménage relates the story himself, but as it was told some years after the event, very likely it never happened at all. Many prophetic reputations have been based upon a fortunate memory.

But after this his success is assured; his career as the greatest dramatist of France is one continued triumphal march. He is loaded with favours by the king; he can hold his own against the insolent nobles who are jealous of his favour; he has a large income; he has a country-house at Auteuil: and, as we have seen, against all this, he has a wife who deceives him. And then, too, he has delicate health and is in constant anxiety about the future. Only he is happy in his friendships, for to Auteuil come Boileau, Racine, Chapelle, Bachaumont, and all the crowd of scholars and free-thinkers—for Molière was not a religious man. Grave, sober, contemplative, no careless scoffer, he yet evidently considered religion as something which had no concern with him. Perhaps it was the consciousness of being excommunicated, for if you are sentenced beforehand it hardly matters what you say or do. Perhaps it was the absorption of his whole mind into his art. Great masters are impatient sometimes of things like disease, religion, poverty, other people's troubles, which disturb the quiet in which an artist loves to sit, and obtrude a troublesome personality. Molière shows no religion either in his life or in his writings, and he found the comfort and pleasure of his life in the society of those friends I have named, and such ladies, as Ninon de l'Enclos and Madame de la Sablière (before her conversion), as would receive a player into their society.

But he had what we may call the *common sense* of religion. He was not, for instance, like Bautru, who

would take off his hat to a crucifix, remarking, "Nous nous saluons, mais nous ne nous parlons pas." Nor was he like Bachaumont, who, after a long life of profligacy, reformed at the last, and used to say that "un honnête homme doit vivre à la porte de l'église et mourir dans la sacristie." But he was a man generally careless of religion, and sometimes more than careless; as when, in the "Festin de Pierre," he makes Don Juan utter his terrific sneer to the beggar, "You pass your life in prayer, and you die of hunger; take this: I give it you for the love of humanity." The heavens are deaf and pitiless: at the callous hand of the profligate alone the beggar finds mercy.

His friends were certainly men of "advanced thought." Take Chapelle, for instance, the drunken poet, who wrote with Bachaumont the delightful "Voyage," half in prose, half in verse. He was the illegitimate son of a *maître des requêtes*, and being legitimized found himself, on the death of his father, the owner of a considerable fortune, with which he devoted himself to a life of pleasure. The Duke de Brissac once invited him to be his companion. Chapelle complied, and started to join his patron. On the way he read a line in Plutarch, "He who follows the great becomes a slave." Struck with the sentiment, he turned back, and spent the rest of his life in great independence and liberty. He gave Molière several valuable hints, and tried to persuade himself and the world that he wrote part of his plays. Molière watched his opportunity; invited him to write a scene of "Les Fâcheux," and when he received the manuscript said good-naturedly, "Chapelle, if you let any one in future believe that you write for me, I shall show them this." It is not on record that Chapelle ever reconciled himself with the church.

It is noteworthy, too, that all that little set which attended Gassendi's lectures together, were suspected of free-thinking. There was the great traveller Bernier, physician to Aurungzebe for eight years; Hesnault, the translator of Lucretius, who repented and died with a rope round his neck in token of contrition, and Cyrano de Bergerac, who killed ten men in duels, all to maintain the honour of his own enormous nose. Gassendi himself, in spite of his refutation of those doctrines of Epicurus, antagonistic to Christianity, was more than suspected of free-thinking.

The personal appearance of Molière is drawn by Mademoiselle Poisson, wife of the comedian:—

> Molière was neither too thin nor too stout: he was inclined to be tall, had a noble carriage and a firm leg: walked gravely, with a serious air: had a large nose, a full mouth, with thick lips, black and strongly-marked eyebrows. To these last he used to give movements on the stage which heightened the comedy of his performance. As for his character, he was gentle, generous, and complaisant. He loved to make speeches, and when he read his comedies, liked to have the players' children to listen, in order to judge of the merits of the piece by their natural movements.

We have other details about him; as that the eyebrows are not only strongly marked, but thick and shaggy: he stoops; he has a short cough; his face is set with melancholy save when he is acting; and he *acts all over*.

Above all, an artist. He held views on the dignity of his profession, which were not understood, even by Boileau himself, the man who most admired and loved him. Two months before his death Boileau expostulated with him on the exertions of his life and the risks he ran. "The continual agitation of your lungs in the theatre," he said, "the excitement of your mind, must sooner or later make you give up acting. Is

there no one in the company but yourself who can take the first parts? Content yourself with composing, and leave theatrical representation to some one else; it will bring you more honour with the public, who will see in the actors mere paid servants of your own; and, for the actors themselves, who are not always so easy to manage, they will the better feel your own superiority." Replied Molière, "There is my honour engaged. I cannot give it up." "Very fine honour," rejoined Boileau, "an honour which consists in blacking your face to make a moustache for Sganarelle, and in handing over your back for the comedian's stick. What? This man, the very first in our age for *esprit* and true philosophy, this ingenious censor of all human folly, has one more extraordinary still than any of those he ridicules every day." Boileau could not understand him: I think we can.

Molière died in 1673, after fifteen years of success, and in the fulness of his powers. The history of his last moments was written by the actor Baron:—

That day, feeling his chest worse than usual, Molière called his wife, and said to her in the presence of Baron, "As long as my life was made up of equal portions of pleasure and pain, I supposed myself happy: but now that I am overwhelmed with pains without being able to count on any moments of satisfaction and pleasure, I see clearly that I must give it up. I can no longer hold out against the mental and bodily sufferings which never give me a moment's repose. How much a man suffers before he dies! nevertheless, I feel that it is all over with me." His wife and Baron were deeply touched by this speech, which they little looked for, although they knew that he was suffering. They prayed him, with tears in their eyes, not to play on that day and to take repose. "What would you have me do?" he cried. "There are fifty workmen who depend upon their day's pay. What will they do if I do not play?" But he sent word to his company that feeling himself more indisposed than usual, he would not play at all that day, unless they were ready at four o'clock precisely. "If not," he said, "I shall not be there, and you may return the money." The company had the

lights lit and the curtains up at four. Molière went through his part with the greatest difficulty, and half the audience perceived that in pronouncing the word *Juro* he had a sort of convulsion. But he passed it off with a forced laugh.

When the piece was finished, he put on his dressing gown and went to Baron's box, to ask what was said of it. . . . . Baron remarked that his hands appeared frozen, and put them in a muff to warm them: he sent for his chairmen to take him home at once, and never left the chair from the Palais Royal to the Rue Richelieu for fear of some accident. When he was in his chamber, he wanted him to take some *bouillon* which Mlle. Molière had always in readiness for him. But he refused, and after eating a little Parmesan cheese with bread, lay down in bed. A moment after he sent to his wife for a pillow filled with some drug which she had promised him. . . . Then he had a violent fit of coughing, bringing up blood. "There," he said, "is the change." Baron cried out in terror. "Do not be alarmed," said Molière, "you have seen me bring up a good deal more blood than that. Go and tell my wife to come upstairs." He remained, assisted by two sisters of those who come to Paris begging for the poor during Lent, to whom he had given hospitality. At this last moment of his life they gave him all the succour that they could, and he manifested the sentiments of a Christian and the resignation due to the will of the Lord. And then he died in their arms, suffocated by the blood which poured from his mouth. So that, when his wife and Baron came upstairs, they found him dead.

The curé of St. Eustache, the parish in which he died, refused him Christian burial, as having died without being reconciled to the church. Accompanied by the curé of Auteuil, the widow made her way to Versailles, and threw herself at the feet of the king. Here, unfortunately, the curé, who was suspected of Jansenism, put in two words for himself to every one for Molière. The king grew impatient and sent them both away. At the same time he wrote to the archbishop to find some middle way. The archbishop gave permission that the body should be buried in the cemetery of St. Joseph, Rue Montmartre, but on the condition that it should not be taken into the church. Accordingly the body was taken to the

burial-place direct. It was in the evening. Outside the house were gathered a great crowd of people whose threatening gestures seemed to denote some fanatical demonstration. They dispersed after the widow had sent out a thousand francs, and the cortège, consisting of two hundred mourners carrying torches, was suffered to proceed unmolested. With it walked two priests, so that Molière was not altogether abandoned by the church. I believe that most biographers have thought it right to discharge a solemn volley of indignation against the archbishop and the church. Harlay, we are told, was a man of immoral habits: what has that to do with it? You might as well find fault with an English judge's decision on the same ground. The church has a rule. Persons who die excommunicate shall not receive the ordinary parting benediction. Molière died as he had lived, out of communion. Those who think that the prayers of the church are likely to be of any use hereafter, ought to get reconciled, or else to agitate for a change of the rule. I am quite certain that Molière was as indifferent to a funeral mass as any Lyons *ouvrier* of the present day. As it was, you see the church actually strained a point in his favour; gave him six feet of consecrated ground; suffered an irregular sort of service to be held, which, while doubtless inefficacious compared with the virtue of a real mass, yet served to mark the regret which the church felt in consigning so great a man to hopelessness.

Somebody made an epitaph on him, and took it to the Prince de Condé. "I have brought you," he said, "Molière's epitaph." "Would to God," said the Prince, bursting into tears, "it was Molière bringing me yours!"

Let us say a few words on Molière's satire.

All weapons are alike, provided they be lethal, to the ferocious satirist. A Juvenal cares little whether he shoots his enemy, tramples upon him, or stabs him in the back, provided he can maim, disable, or kill him. All missiles are justifiable by the rules of satiric warfare; whether epithets undeserved, crimes never committed, motives not dreamed of, antecedents invented —all are equally good, provided only they be equally useful. To describe your enemy as stupid is nothing; to be vicious is nothing. He must be superlatively vicious and incredibly stupid. True it is that the ferocity of the satirist seems to produce wonderfully little effect. He foams at the mouth, and gnashes with his teeth: the unthinking folk stare, and go on their way. We do not learn that the later Empire was greatly improved by the virtuous verses of Juvenal; and the Franciscan friars—*fratres fraterrimi*—appear to have been little the worse for Buchanan's lashing. But when the indignant moralist has had his say, and comes down wiping his brow, there is a chance for him who tries to lead the people another way, not by hurling abuse at them, but by showing them their idols in a true light—by making them see for themselves how petty, insignificant, and powerless are their gods. The glamour falls from the eyes of the world, and it wakes, like Titania, to find that it has been enamoured of a monster. So the most fitting emblem for satire would be the thyrsus, wreathed with the leaves which hide the spear-head. It belongs to the two men who, above all, have been successful satirists—Erasmus and Molière. It does not belong to Buchanan, to Boileau, or to Pope. The world's respect for a principle or an institution is, as it were, its very breath of life; when this goes, when the world agrees to laugh at it, it falls,

never to revive again. And thus it is that Molière is stronger than Boileau. Both worked in the same field; both aimed at the maintenance of sense and taste; both had the true gift of the satirist in a genuine, not a pretended, hatred for shams and unrealities and windbags. But they pursued different methods of attack, and got very different results. It is certain to me that Trissotin, Vadius, and Tartuffe, Cathos, Madelon, and Armande, Doctor Diafoirus and Doctor Desfonandres, did more to damage bigots and quacks, hypocrites and pedants, to restore reason to literature, and to destroy affectation and humbug, than all Boileau's poems put together. We would not have lost the works of the very prophet of common-sense; but we miss in him that consideration and tenderness for human failings which prevent Molière from ever being, or pretending to be, in a real rage. Boileau pretends not to be able to hide his scorn; while with Molière, flowers, songs, laughter, the music of maidens' voices, the sighs and hopes of lovers, the atmosphere of life and the world, surround the objects of his satire. Henriette and Clitandre, Valère and Marianne, make us sometimes forget the follies of Armande and the hypocrisies of Tartuffe; while these, as in the world, are not the whole, but only a part of life.

The gallery of Molière, for so great a dramatist, is an extremely limited one. Content at first to imitate the Spanish school of intrigue, in which all the *dramatis personæ* are cast in uniform moulds, and delineation of character is entirely out of the question, it was not till late in his dramatic life that he found his real field, and attacked the follies and foibles of the day. His "Avare," his "Dépit Amoureux," and even his "École des Maris," belong to no time and all time; while the

"Précieuses Ridicules," the earliest of his satiric comedies properly so called, was yet a mere sketch, and had to wait for six years before it found a true successor in the "Tartuffe," the "Bourgeois Gentilhomme," and the "Femmes Savantes," all of which belong to the last five years of Molière's life. His muse was to be a tree whose best fruit comes late, and in too small quantity.

Molière had two subjects of satire which he shared with every comedian, and even every buffoon, namely, the stock subjects of the aspiring citizen and the quack physician; and he had two others which he made peculiarly his own, which were his own creation—the hypocrite, the pretended pious, and the pedants who set themselves up for judges of good taste. The "Bourgeois Gentilhomme" has been put upon every stage; there are Jourdains and Dandins in every literature; and we need not linger over the follies of the citizen aping the manners of the great. Let us rather pass on, to show how the times themselves illustrate the force and point of Molière with regard to the remaining classes. Bright and fresh as his plays are, they assume colours far brighter and fresher to him who takes the trouble—let us rather say, gives himself the pleasure—of reading about the men and women who formed the society of Molière's Paris—men and women be it observed, not opinions and theories. The materials are abundant, and the research required is not laborious, for the seventeenth century is as well known to us as our own.

In the "Précieuses Ridicules" we have the story of two young ladies from the country. Deeply impressed with the reading of "Clélie," they have recently arrived in Paris, and are longing to form part of a society which that mellifluous romance has taught them to believe the only thing worth living for. They repel their

honest country-bred suitors with the greatest disdain, because their advances are not made in the forms prescribed by Mlle. Scudéri. In revenge, the two gentlemen dress up their valets as persons of distinction, and send them to pay a morning call. The vulgarity and pretension of the two servants, the enormous pleasure they take in performing their part, the little affectations of the poor girls, and their innocent delight at getting, as they suppose, a chance of realizing their fondest hopes by forming a part of the society which they only know from their reading, are the slight materials out of which the piece is constructed.

In the "Femmes Savantes" a higher note is struck. It is not this time a pair of provincial damsels longing to see the coteries of which they have heard so much, but the very coterie itself—a family of women who have taken up the fashionable ideas of the time, and devote themselves to science, criticism, and art. Their criticism is worthless, their science pretence, and their knowledge of art nothing. They propose to establish an Academy for which Plato's Republic—of which they understand as much as if it were so much Hebrew—is to furnish the rules and form the model. It is destined to establish the equality of women with men—or, to use their own words (it really seems as if Molière were writing to-day):—

Nous voulons montrer à de certains esprits,
Dont l'orgueilleux savoir nous traite avec mépris,
Que de science aussi les femmes sont meublées;
Qu'on peut faire, comme eux, de doctes assemblées,
Conduites en cela par des ordres meilleurs;
Qu'on y veut réunir ce qu'on sépare ailleurs,
Mêler le beau langage et les hautes sciences,
Découvrir la nature en mille expériences,
Et sur les questions qu'on pourra proposer,
Fuire entre chaque secte et n'en point épouser."

Above all, they burn to make scientific discoveries. Armed with telescopes, compasses, and mathematical instruments, they are ready to prove that woman's region of thought extends beyond the domain of ribbons and shawls, and is bounded only by those limits assigned to the masculine intellect. Indeed, they go beyond the powers of man, and have already made discoveries of startling interest, greater than any yet vouchsafed to the male eye. For one of them (with commendable modesty) announces that she has discerned men in the moon; while another, confessing to an inferior power of vision, has only as yet made out the church-steeples of that satellite. They are prepared, in their Academy, to discuss and teach grammar, history, moral and political philosophy. But their immediate work is the reform of language. All doubtful and coarse expressions are to be abolished; commonplaces will be banished; and they have vowed a mortal hatred against a multitude of nouns, verbs, and adjectives, which are henceforth to be expunged from the language. Finally, by their own laws, they are to be the absolute critics of every work—judges, from whose decision there is to be no appeal—of prose and verse:—

> Nous chercherons partout à trouver à redire,
> Et ne verrons que nous qui sachent bien écrire.

It is refreshing to find the Rights of Women asserted so long ago, and in terms as plain as those we are getting accustomed to now. And there is comfort in the thought that, disagreeable as the present prospect may appear, the whole question was as vehemently discussed and as forcibly argued two hundred years ago, with no result.

"Rise," says Armande to her grovelling and down-trodden sister, "rise above these low and vulgar incli-

nations. Make yourself sensible to the delights of study and of science. Marry yourself to philosophy. Give up to reason the sovereign lordship. What can you see, what is there to see, in marriage?" "I see," says the contemptible Henriette, "I see my husband, my children, and my home."

In these two plays there was not a single word of exaggeration. When Ménage, after the first representation of the "Précieuses Ridicules," made that speech which you have just now read, to Chapelain, the greatest sinner of all, he pronounced the first recognition of what was to prove the death-blow to the conceits and mannerisms of his own circle. They were henceforth to burn what they used to adore, and to adore what they used to burn. Most of the set, however, were too hardened in their own beliefs, and went on adoring at the ruined shrines of their old idols long after the people had given them up.

But the *précieuses* of Molière's play must not be carelessly or hastily confounded with that brilliant circle first got together at the Hôtel de Rambouillet, of which we have had to speak so much already. This mansion was not yet, it is true, closed, but its glories were departed. Julie de Vivonne, Marquise de Rambouillet, had a long and glorious reign of more than thirty years, the queen of Parisian society. At the age of twenty, being then a matron of eight years' standing, she withdrew from the Louvre, pretending that she found no pleasure in the noise and tumult of the royal assemblies. It seems very likely that a personal dislike which she had conceived for Louis XIII. had a good deal to do with her retirement. She went to her hotel, newly built and decorated after her own designs, the most beautiful as it was also the most commodious house in

Paris, and announced her resolution to leave it no more. She kept this resolution, which cost her nothing, because society came to her, for fifty-five years, when she died, full of years and of honour, leaving not a single person to say a word against her. The memory of this pure woman is altogether sweet and holy; her influence, save in the region of art, was altogether good—her example altogether elevating. At her house, for thirty years at least, an assembly gathered every evening of the week. Here (Madame de Rambouillet's own innovations) all the year round fresh-cut flowers filled the vases; here the windows opened to the ground, and enabled the visitors to step into the gardens of the Hôtel, the finest in Paris; here the old dark and sombre colours of the walls were replaced by bright blue and gold, and here the best people in Paris assembled, and modern society began.

But criticism was not the object of the Hôtel. It was a social circle, where everybody was required to repress himself, and to consider his exertions only valuable in so far as they contributed to make other people happy. This was, as we have seen, its first, and so far as Madame de Rambouillet herself was concerned, its only object. Abuses naturally crept in with success. Pedantry began to take the place of scholarship; prigs, *i.e.* *précieux et précieuses*, grew up as thick as dandelions; a mannerism of speech set in; *niceness* reigned in the place of delicacy; false canons of taste were introduced and accepted; the objection to coarse language was carried absurdly far; when the younger daughter unhappily took to fainting at a doubtful word, and it became the fashion to emulate a sensibility so remarkable and so difficult of attainment, it really seemed as if the French language was going to be robbed of half its

words, and to be reduced to expressing the simplest ideas by circumlocution. All this was not the fault of Madame de Rambouillet. What she originally proposed she succeeded in effecting; and the language of Louis Quatorze was of a very different tone from that of his illustrious but outspoken grandfather, with his celebrated oath of "*Ventre Saint Gris!*" The abuses sprang from the excessive zeal of her disciples, and date from the decay of the Hôtel. For after thirty years of prosperity, the circle began to fall away. Julie, the eldest daughter—the divine Julie, the Philomide of Mlle. Scudéri, the heroine of the "Garland"—yielded her hand at last, and after twelve years of wooing, to her patient lover, M. de Montausier. She was then a tender young thing of thirty-eight. Angélique, her sister, the fragile thing who fainted even at moral words if they sounded strong, married the Count de Grignan, and in a measure lost her extreme sensibility. Angélique Paulet, the "Élise" of Mlle. Scudéri, who was more beautiful at fifty than she had been at twenty, and at twenty was more beautiful than Helen, died suddenly, to the great grief of everybody. The troubles of the Fronde broke out. M. de Rambouillet died. The two sons died—one in battle, the other of the plague. Sickness fell upon poor Arthenice herself, and she could not bear the sight of a fire in winter or the sun in summer. Her old friends dropped off at her side, for no one ever deserted her, to join the majority; the glories of her youth could not be renewed; new and rival circles were established, notably that of Mlle. Scudéri, her old disciple, and were followed by the more advanced of the *précieuses;* and it was at these assemblies, not those older ones of Madame de Rambouillet, that taste declined and genius drooped; it is one of these that Molière ridicules in the "Femmes Savantes."

The society which haunted their gatherings is depicted in the novels of Mlle. Scudéri, who was the Richardson of France, only with more than Richardson's propriety and less of Richardson's vigour. Her romances—more dreary than the human brain can now conceive—have the special interest that all the characters are portraits. Cyrus is Conti; Mandane is the Duchess of Longueville; Cléomire, Madame de Rambouillet; Élise, Angélique Paulet; while Sappho is the modest name assumed by the writer herself. The assumption of names was an affectation of the time in private life; we all know how that of Arthenice was given to Madame de Rambouillet, and how little Madelon and Cathos, in the "Précieuses Ridicules," tell their papa, in their pretty conceited way, that they intend no longer to be called by names so common and so utterly unknown to the grand style, but by those of Polixène and Ariste.

Everything which had been introduced by Madame de Rambouillet, with a view to the formation of a harmonious and untroubled social circle, was exaggerated and distorted by Mlle. Scudéri and her followers. Because language was to be pure the commonest things were to be expressed by circumlocution. "Give me," says Madelon, "the counsellor of the Graces," meaning the looking-glass. "Convey us," says Cathos, "the commodities of conversation," meaning "Place chairs." And while Madame de Rambouillet kept love as much as possible out of her circle, because love-matters are the most fruitful source of dissension and jealousy, the Scudéri coterie would prohibit it altogether, substituting a mawkish Platonic affection, which admitted of tawdry and meaningless compliments. If it satisfied the women—which does not appear, from the slight

evidence we possess, to have been the case—it was only laughed at by the men. Nor could real flesh and blood ever wholly be kept out, and therefore they bethought them of laws and regulations by which love could be safely carried on; and in the "Clélie" there is the delicious "Carte du Tendre," or "Map of Affection," where *Billets Doux*, *Petits Soins*, *Billets Galants*, and *Jolis Vers*, form villages on the highroad of love. Love-making, henceforth, was to be a matter of science and study; there was to be a method of attack and one of defence, and the fortress was only to yield after the siege had been carried on according to the most scientific mode, and the defence been as obstinate as the system of "Clélie" called for.

The poets who formed the later circles were as degenerate as might have been expected. They wrote for the ladies, and the productions most pleasing to the ladies were enigmas, portraits, madrigals, and sonnets. Mascarille says that he can count two hundred songs, as many sonnets, four hundred epigrams, more than a thousand madrigals, without enumerating enigmas and portraits, and that he is going to turn the whole of Roman history into madrigals. It is a sonnet which Trissotin reads to the enraptured Philaminte, Armande, and Belise. And of portraits we have whole galleries in Mlle. Scudéri herself, who drew those of every one of her friends.

It has been doubted whether Molière ever intended to satirize Mlle. Scudéri herself. I think there need be no doubt whatever on the subject. The fact that Boileau did not scruple to attack this great woman is sufficient to dispel any doubt. Boileau and Molière were united by a firm friendship. Different as were their minds, in many respects they thought alike. The

same good sense guided both: if Molière writes on a subject, we can find Boileau suggesting it; and what is to be found in the satires of the one will be found as well in the comedies of the other.

At the same time it must be owned that the leader of the *précieuses* was not so utterly ridiculous. She had been brought up in a fairly good school; she was sensible that her example, imitated beyond due limits, led to affectations and ridicule; indeed, she complains herself of the follies of her rivals and imitators. But she was in a way responsible for these very follies. The leader of a circle which pretended to be learned, and rebelled against the authority of men, without the excuse of genius or scholarship, she encrusted herself in the ideas of her youth, and probably did not know, till her complacency was rudely disturbed by Molière and Boileau, that a new world of thought had sprung up around her. But as the ladies of Tunbridge Wells petted and idolized Richardson, bringing him consolation for the wicked insults of that Mohawk Fielding, so her circle of admirers, with Pellisson, "the ill-favoured one," at its head, gathered round her, and carried on the madrigals, sonnets, enigmas, and portraits, till she died, at the advanced age of ninety-six.

The "Femmes Savantes" not only attacked a circle, but, almost by name, one of its most illustrious members, the Abbé Cotin. He had managed to offend both Boileau and Molière—the former, because he did not attempt to disguise his contempt for Boileau's earlier poems; the latter, because he officiously suggested to M. de Montausier that he was the original of Alceste in the "Misanthrope." Cotin was the writer of an immense quantity of verse, all kinds flowing with equal readiness from his pen, all being equally

insipid and fashionable. In his own person he was a kind of type of every extravagance and affectation to which the *précieuses* had led their followers. To Boileau, as we have seen, he was simply the monarch of bad taste:—

> Que sert à Cotin la raison, qui lui crie,
> "N'écris plus, guéris-toi d'une vaine folie?"

When he speaks of the violation of common-sense he names Cotin; Cotin illustrates his discourses on mediocrity and obscurity; Cotin points the moral to his sermon on taste. These attacks, however, were comparatively harmless; they were the compliments usually paid by writers to others against whom they had a grudge. Cotin would not be extinguished by these. It was reserved for Molière to suppress him once and for ever.

Most fatally for the poor abbé, he fell out one evening with Ménage on the merits of a sonnet. The dispute took place in the presence of ladies, *précieuses*, rose to a quarrel, almost in the very words of the famous quarrel between Trissotin and Vadius, and was quite as undignified and absurd. Boileau, the moment he heard of it, ran with the joyful news to Molière, who hastened to put into his new piece a perfect copy of their common enemy, with his overweening self-conceit, his satisfaction at the adulation of the women, and, to crown all, the very quarrel, in its most ridiculous light, which was the talk of the town. The name of the character was at first Tricotin, but this appearing too personal, it was softened to Trissotin. Still, that there might be no doubt whatever in anybody's mind as to the person intended, Boileau and Chapelle made it their special business to go up and down the town telling

everybody; so that when the piece appeared there was a general rush to see put on the stage the great Academician, the Abbé Cotin, belauding himself and quarrelling with Ménage. The latter was spared, comparatively. He tells us himself that the quarrel really took place, though he hides his own share in it—which is natural. But Cotin was crushed by the blow. He lived for nearly ten years more—his reputation gone, his audience of admiring ladies gone, their adulation gone. No more literary fame for him, no more autocratic decrees at the Academy; and when he died there was not found one—not even among his brother Academicians—to pronounce his *éloge*—not one so poor as to do him reverence.

It was a time when literary quarrels were frequent and bitter. Another quarrel is related by Furetière, illustrative of the tempers of the irritable race of authors. MM. A. and B., like Vadius and Trissotin, are discussing the merits of a poem; of course they disagree, and A., losing his temper, so far forgets what is due to politeness as to administer a box on the ear to B. Not able, naturally, to brook this insult, B. goes away, and in the heat and blindness of his wrath buys a new sword, preserving enough coolness of judgment to select one several inches longer than that worn by A. Fortified by the consciousness of a good cause, and this superiority in the length of his rapier, he attacks his enemy, meeting him in the street. But the crafty A. prepared for an encounter, and, with no more stomach than the other for cold steel, has adopted a stratagem of his own. His pockets are full of dust, and throwing handfuls into his adversary's eyes, he blinds him, and so wins an easy and a bloodless victory.

But it is time to leave the *précieuses*. What is this

group of grave and reverend men, mounted on the easy-paced mule, wearing high-peaked hats, flowing robes, and majestic wigs? They are the doctors, Molière's doctors—

Savantissimi doctores,
Medicinæ professores,
Qui hic assemblati sunt.

Or, to quote another epigram:—

What makes a learned doctor? Speak.
A mien pedantic; every word
Must be in Latin or in Greek:
A mighty wig, a gown absurd,
With fur and satin richly lined.
In these great qualities combined
A learned doctor you will find.

This profession has always divided with the church the honour of being the most virulently satirized. In Molière's time, of course, it was still highly dangerous to say too much about the church; while the third learned profession, the law, had fingers too long. But doctors were safe game.

I do not know whether the profession were quacks so much as the people were credulous. Furetière, while he gives us his celebrated definition of a physician as one who is paid for telling us tales (*fariboles*) in the sick chamber, till nature heals us or his medicines kill, almost in the same breath gravely relates the wonders he has seen wrought by a physician with a small phial of *teinture de lune* valued at four hundred pistoles, with which he could cure everything.

When a great man died, of course his physicians were accused of killing him. Thus at the death of Henrietta, daughter of Henry IV. and wife of our Charles I., some one wrote on her physician, Valot:—

A cruel fate, the same for each,
Three of a royal race befel;
What killed the husband and the sire,
The wife and daughter slew as well.
Each died by an assassin's blow:
Ravaillac, Cromwell, and Valot.
Henry by stroke of traitor's knife,
Charles on the scaffold lost his head;
And now the daughter and the wife,
Slain by her doctor, here lies dead.

And after the death of Cardinal Mazarin, over whom the doctors wrangled, not being able to make up their minds as to his disease, the people would make way for Doctor Guénant in the streets, crying, "Let him pass —let him pass! He is the doctor who killed the cardinal for us."

I do not think that Molière was actuated by any really strong feeling about doctors. They were fair game; they were easy to ridicule; everybody would join in the laugh, and no one, really, was hurt. We laugh at the physician when we are well, on whose lips we hang with fear and trembling when we are unwell. And as for Molière himself, one of his dearest personal friends was a physician. "He gives me medicine," he said; "I don't take it, and I get well."

The great creation of Molière, his own undisputed character, is "Tartuffe." The play, first performed in an unfinished state before the king, was withdrawn in the face of strong ecclesiastical opposition, and kept back for three years before it could obtain a licence. Ménage takes credit to himself for advocating its cause with President de Lamoignon on the ground of its excellent moral. The church of course regarded the piece with a profound horror, while the opposition it met with, and the applause with which it was greeted, sufficiently testify to the *vraisemblance* of the principal character.

There was, in fact, a crowd of Tartuffes in Paris during the seventeenth century. It was a great time for theological controversies and discussions. These produced a deep and lasting effect, and a very pernicious one, upon the religious life of the country. If the latter years of Louis were marked by a profound religious gloom, of which the "Tartuffe" seems a sort of prophetic vision, it was not caused so much by the king's awakened conscience and convictions, as forced by the conditions of time on the weakness of his old age. The cloud had been gathering during the whole long reign; the ascetics of Port-Royal began their course early in the century; while it was yet in its early half, Madame de Sablé, Madame de Longueville, and a crowd of others, retired to the gloomy shades of the monastery *pour faire leur salut.* The religious movement had its ebb and flow, its tides, its periods of maximum and minimum excitement. But when the excitement was at its highest the churches were crammed; men who were not preachers or priests got reputations for extraordinary piety; they were taken into houses and maintained in luxury; they were consulted, and asked to advise, on all matters; they were encouraged to affect a deeper religious sense than they possessed, and the weakness of their entertainers forced hypocrisy upon them. The very first thing they advised was to have nothing to do with the theatre. "All amusements," writes Madame de Sablé, "are bad for the Christian life, but among them all there is none to be feared so much as the theatre." Madame de Longueville thought that, "unless there was some sort of necessity in the thing, there must be sin in play-acting." Her brother the Prince de Conti, Sarasin's former patron, withdrew his support from the stage,

and Bossuet preached against it. The truth was that the greatest hindrance to the "revival" which the religious world wanted to produce, and waited for with so much interest and hope, was this very "Tartuffe," known and condemned long before it received its licence. For here, clinging to the coarse and oily Stiggins of the seventeenth century, was to be seen that common type of the feeble creature which, terrified into religion, cannot stand alone, and leans for support on the first prop which offers itself; and here too was set forth, in Cléante, the type of the strong and balanced mind, not to be turned aside from the even tenor of its way by any fleeting enthusiasm of the moment, or any religious excitement:—

> En un mot, je sais, pour toute ma science,
> Du faux avec le vrai faire la différence:
> Et comme je ne vois nul genre de héros
> Qui soit plus à priser que les parfaits dévots,
> Aucune chose au monde et plus noble et plus belle
> Que la sainte ferveur d'un véritable zèle,
> Aussi ne vois-je rien qui soit plus odieux
> Que le dehors plâtré d'un zèle spécieux.

It is fair to say that Molière's was not the only voice, though his appears to have been the first, lifted up against the folly and danger of religious exaggeration and excitement. La Fontaine laughed at it, till they caught him and converted him. Chapelle abused it: Boileau sneered at it: Furetière growled at it. "After all," he says, "we must accommodate ourselves to the laws of our being. When we retire from the world, we desert the ruling influences of order, and for what? To abandon ourselves to our imaginations in the desert, and to live in places where our very vexations come to seem like victories to us . . . What are we to say of the folly of parents who make their children read the

works of Catullus and Horace, and refuse to let them go to see 'Tartuffe?'"

And besides people like the Port-Royalists, well meaning if injudicious, and certainly deeply religious, there was an ignorant and dissolute priesthood whom even Molière dared not attack. The very man who refused him Christian burial, Harlay-Champvallon, Archbishop of Paris, was of extreme profligacy. He was excessively handsome, and a story is told how some one, seeing him surrounded by ladies, exclaimed, "*Formosi pecoris custos*," upon which one of the ladies completed the line—"*formosior ipse*."

Stories, abundant and suggestive, are told everywhere about the priests of the time. One relates how a certain preacher, having to celebrate a saint's day, delivered himself of the following sermon from the pulpit: "My brethren, it is to-day the feast of St. ——; on this day last year I told you all I knew about him. I have not heard that during the past twelve months he has distinguished himself in any way whatever. I have, therefore, nothing more to add."

And another, to finish, speaking of the scandalous behaviour of priests at funerals, tells how a certain old lady left by will a bequest to the officiating priests, subject to the singular condition that they should not laugh while celebrating her funeral mass. Mindful of the money, their reverences began well and solemnly. But presently, at sight of each other's long faces, set in the deepest gloom, they burst into a simultaneous roar of laughter and lost the money.

But we could go on for ever. Let us stop. I have endeavoured to show the man and his surroundings rather than to criticize his works. These you may read for yourselves. But his plays are so delightful,

the wit in them is so fresh and bright, that it is worth while to get every light possible to throw upon them, and to bring out with greater clearness those of the points, a knowledge of which depend upon a knowledge of his actors, his audiences, his theatre, and the state of that society for which he wrote.

Chapter XVI.

REGNARD.

Let me have audience for a word or two.
As You Like it.

THE only successor of Molière: as Ben Jonson is to Shakespeare, so is Regnard to Molière; and just as much as Ben Jonson is below Shakespeare, so is Regnard below Molière. But a man of mark; one who possessed genius, audacity, ambition, versatility, and above all, like Rabelais, Regnier, and Beaumarchais, that inexhaustible vein of gaiety and good spirits which seems the peculiar gift of the Frenchman. No one reads Regnard now—for that matter, very few read Molière, except at school; yet, whether as a dramatist, traveller, or satirist, he is a writer whom we can read with pleasure and remember with pleasure. And his life had incidents of more than common value: like Cervantes, he was a prisoner with the Moors; he was a great traveller, and he knew how to describe his travels: he was a *bon-vivant*, a man of society, a man of the world, an associate of all the ablest men of his own time. Unluckily, he came at a time when the writers of the *historiettes*, *mémoires*, and letters seem to

have been resting from their labours for a generation. We know all about the personal history, from themselves and others, of Saint Amant, Racine, Boileau, and Molière; we know, from Collé and Grimm, all that is to be said about the writers of the eighteenth century: Boswells there were before Regnard and after him; none, unfortunately, of his own time. Therefore we have to fall back upon the things he chooses to tell us himself, and even take the man on trust from materials he has himself selected. Now the biographer loves to get the weak points as well as the strong: to see the hero in his night-shirt; to act as his valet de chambre, to put together the anecdotes which show those *faiblesses* which set off the strong points and act as contrast to the situations. None of us, in fact, can afford to do without the valet; the world refuses to accept a man on his own statement, and we learn to love our great men best when we have learned that they were even as ourselves, infused with the same weaknesses, as liable to fall, no stronger than ourselves, and subject to the same temptations.

Regnard, however, even on his own showing, has but little of the heroic about him; and from the scanty details he gives us of himself, we may very well construct a model which shall not, after all, fall very far short of the real man. He was born in 1655, of well-to-do parents in trade, thus belonging to the same rank of life as Molière, in the Halles of Paris. As a schoolboy and a student he did nothing creditable to himself or his masters, but rather the reverse:—

> Lui qui ne sut jamais ni le grec, ni l'hébreu,
> Qui joua jour et nuit, fit grand' chère et bon feu.

Fortunately, he had not to make his own way in the world, for his father, dying when his only son was

twenty-one, left him a fortune of 40,000 crowns, equivalent to at least £40,000 at the present value of money. With this sum in hand he had no uneasiness as to his future, and set off on his travels, going first to Italy. He was a gambler, and would appear to have been a fortunate one, because he returned from his first visit to Italy, having paid all his expenses by his gains and netted 10,000 crowns as well. He was at this time a tall, handsome young fellow, with, as his portraits show us, large eyes, strongly marked features, a firm-set chin, and full tremulous lips. Under the great wig of the seventeenth century, most faces appear to be alike, and one fears that photographic minuteness was generally given up in the attempt to produce a face which should be like the original, and yet destroy the disagreeable details. Still there can be no doubt that young Regnard was as attractive in appearance as in manners. He describes himself with a pen which may be as flattering as his portrait, but which gives us clearly something of the truth:—

> Zelmis is a gentleman who pleases at first sight: you see him for the first time and remark him. His appearance is so advantageous that you need not look into his features to find him agreeable. You must only, ladies, be careful not to love him too well.

Zelmis made a second journey to Italy, this time with very disastrous results. It was at Bologna, in carnival time, that he met his fate, the one single passion of his life. She was a Provençale, the charming Elvire, married to a M. de Prade; and, with her husband, was looking on at the horse-racing when Zelmis first saw her. An introduction to her was simply effected by his clearing the place of certain persons who obstructed her view of the races. She smiled upon him—happy Zelmis!

Elvire saw him; she found him *bien fait;* she conceived an esteem for him; she thanked him in the most obliging terms possible. Whatever she said was with an accent so tender, and an air so easy, that it seemed as if she asked for your heart. . . . Even if the beauty of this Provençale had not charmed him, her words would have made him more in love; and something, I know not what, a thousand times more touching than her beauty, surprised him; so that his love from that very moment was at a height which the greatest passions generally take a considerable time to reach.

And then Zelmis called on Elvire: was well received: fell in love more and more: while the lady, though not forgetful of her marriage vows, received with pleasure the adoration of her new acquaintance. One evening, after receiving a smile from her, his highest reward, he perceived that another, an *inconnu*, was treated with the same generosity. Furious at this apparent coquetry, he addressed the stranger: "You are happy, monsieur," he said, "in knowing the lady who has just passed. Doubtless you love her. As for that, it is enough to see her, in order to feel her charms; and the manner in which you have been received shows that you are not indifferent to her." The *inconnu* smiled. "Yes," he said, "you are right: I love her, and I believe I may fairly say that I am loved in return;" words which threw the lover into mere despair. But the *inconnu*, luckily or unluckily, was the lady's husband; and if Zelmis was thrown into despair, the husband was thrown into jealousy. No more accidental *rencontres* with Elvire: no more smiles, no more sweet whispers at a ball, for De Prade locked her up. Then Zelmis, wandering alone among the trees, gave himself up to dreaming of his Elvire; day after day he tried to meet her, but without success; and when he learned by accident that they were gone to Rome, he followed them. There they met again, at a masked ball first,

and afterwards at the ambassador's. He found out where she was living, and, with the help of the lady's maid—always that lady's maid, Lisette—managed to see her every day, in the most Platonic way, though his passion was at fever heat, M. de Prade, presumably—at least one hopes so—knowing nothing whatever about these stolen interviews. At last, and after many pleadings, he extorted from the lady a confession that she was not wholly insensible to his passion. Oh! joy of joys—she was not wholly insensible! The moralist pauses here to remark on the extraordinary pleasure which young Regnard, then about two-and-twenty, finds in these perilous skatings on thin ice, when the lady's avowal of what may be called a tendency to an inclination is like the premonitory cracking which leads to the giving way of the whole, immersion, possible drowning, certain rheumatic pains, and trouble for the rest of your days. However, he was still young, and probably Elvire, who played with him, was a little older in years, and a great deal older in experience. Came letters from France. Regnard must start at once for home, on business of an urgent nature. He tore himself from his adored one; but love, coupled with his other great passion, over-eating, laid him up at Florence with a fever, and for several months he was unable to travel. At last he got better, and took ship at Genoa. Imagine his surprise and joy at seeing on the deck, when he went on board, no other than Elvire herself, with her husband. Then was enacted for two or three days one of those little comedies which, pleasant enough for a while, are sure, if not stopped at the right moment, to turn into tragedies. For De Prade was jealous. If his wife looked at Zelmis, if Zelmis looked at his wife, he fell into fits of jealousy which almost

deprived him of self-control. As for Zelmis—they all three had to live in the same cabin—

The joy of meeting Elvire, the fear of losing her again; the imaginary pleasure of sleeping close to her; natural jealousy at seeing her in another's arms; all this threw him into agonies which did not allow him a moment of repose. La belle Provençale was no happier. She too was jealous. . . . "What new passion kept him in Italy? Ah! I am betrayed, I am deserted; Zelmis loves me no longer."

The husband was equally unable to sleep, and thus these three lay in their cabin at night, all broad awake, all troubled with suspicions, jealousies, and doubts, perhaps, too, with sea-sickness, so that it must have been a real relief when, after passing Corsica, two vessels bore down upon them, which, after hoisting successively the flags of France, Spain, Holland, Venice, and Malta—the unprincipled pirates—boldly ran up their own, the standard of Barbary, accompanying the disquieting signal by a broadside of all their guns. Their own was an English ship; the captain was cut in two by a chain-shot; the officers were all killed, and when the Moors boarded her, hardly anybody was left to defend the deck except Zelmis, who protected the Provençale sword in hand—nothing said about her husband—until, wounded and exhausted, he sank upon the pile of Moors whom he had killed with his own hand. Regnard, then, was brave as well as handsome: it is a detail which he gives of himself, and one is glad to learn it. Notwithstanding his courage, the ship was taken, crew and passengers made prisoners, and carried off to Algiers by Captain Mustapha, a gentleman pirate of admirable manners, quite the corsair of romance, who treated Elvire with a consideration entirely unusual, if one may judge from passages relating similar events, in "Candide" and elsewhere.

Arrived at Algiers the captives were all sold, Elvire to the Bey, Baba Hassan by name, Zelmis to Achmet Thalem, one of the richest and most cruel of the Algerians, and the husband to one Omar. Zelmis, for his part, promising a large ransom, was treated with comparative kindness, and having shown a creditable skill in making ragoûts was made cook,[1] an occupation which permitted him to go about the city and make inquiries as to the welfare of Elvire. He discovered where she was, and, by the help of a new acquaintance, one Mehemet, an *employé* of the palace, even found means to see and speak to Elvire as she was conveyed to the baths. And here Regnard, with a natural desire to exalt his passion and prove his own heroism, goes into certain details which even to the eye of reverent criticism appear improbable and even apocryphal. For he tells us how he was employed by the Bey to furnish certain designs and paintings, how under colour of bringing these things to the palace he gained access to the harem and even conversed with Elvire, how he planned an escape as romantic as that of Robinson Crusoe, how he actually succeeded in putting to sea with Elvire, and how they were caught and brought back without being punished at all, Baba Hassan allowing himself to manifest nothing but a sublime sorrow—Elvire, the only authority on this delicate part of the history, certainly always painted the monarch as a very Scipio, and she had every opportunity of knowing the truth—while Achmet went no farther than to shut up his prisoner more closely and, which is strange, allow him

[1] He says he became a painter, but this is the pardonable softening down of an autobiographer.

the society of his four beautiful wives. No bastinado, no impaling, no beheading at all.

What always happens when a Frenchman, young, tall, handsome, *spirituel*, is locked up with four lovely Algerian ladies? Do not at least two of them fall in love with him at once? This was the unfortunate case with Zelmis. They were all beautiful, but the fairest was Immona; she it was who first betrayed her passion, and in a thousand little ways, by languishing looks, by smiles, by little gestures, called on her slave to return the passion. Next it was Fatima who remarked the coldness of Zelmis to Immona, and wrongly construed it into admiration of her own superior charms. This mistake cleared up, there remained jealousy and disappointed vanity, which rage in Algerian as well as in Parisian hearts, and poor Zelmis must be made to learn *furens quid fœmina possit.* Zelmis, indeed, madly though he loved Elvire, could not altogether remain insensible to the charms of Immona, and after various hairbreadth escapes and dreadful perils successfully surmounted, was found by Achmet in a situation at once delicate and difficult to explain. Joseph Surface himself was not more effectually disconcerted. And then a terrible alternative remained: he must renounce his faith or be burned alive. Which of these Zelmis would have chosen we do not know, for at this juncture the French consul interposed, and representing to Achmet the certainty and greatness of the ransom, persuaded him to withdraw his charge and acknowledge he had acted on simple suspicion. The ransom arrived and Zelmis was free. More than this, Elvire, too, was freed by the incomparable and disinterested generosity of the enamoured Babà Hassan, and her husband was reported dead. The two returned together

to France, alternately shedding tears for poor De Prade, and clasping each other's hands in an ecstasy of happiness.

Let us hasten to the end of this tragical romance. They landed in France; they lived near each other; they waited only for the term of widowhood to expire in order to complete their happiness. Thus eight months had passed away, Zelmis falling daily more and more deeply in love; Elvire giving back sigh for sigh—when, one day, Zelmis being with the fair widow, a servant told them that two monks from Algiers wished to see Elvire. Two monks! But with them, no monk at all, was none other than De Prade, not dead, but alive. Ragged, wasted with hunger and privation, barefoot—it was De Prade himself who threw himself into the arms of Elvire his wife.

This was too much. Zelmis left the pair thus strangely reunited and fled abroad to seek oblivion in absence and time. We hear no more of Elvire. Time and absence often enough keep the heart constant to its former object. It is the return, after many years, that disillusionizes. When Zelmis got back to France we may picture him calling upon Elvire and waiting with a beating heart the moment of seeing her again. She comes. He sees her again, and, like a house of cards, his love, the regrets of all the years, his tender memories, his dreams of beginning again the old sweet theme, everything falls to pieces and vanishes, and Zelmis is a free man once more. For Elvire is as old as himself, and he is six-and-thirty; the graceful lines of youth have developed into the full-blown curves of matronhood; her cheeks are painted, her eyes have lost the lustre of their youth; and when she speaks with the same old sentimental sigh, it seems like some horrid mockery of a lifelong dream.

Elvire? She is no longer Elvire—she is Madame de Prade, and good Monsieur her husband, the patient much-tried man, may rest at last in peace, for Zelmis is dead and buried, and only Regnard is left, who may still perhaps trouble the rest of other married men, but will leave him and his alone.

This romance, the only one in his life, is told us, as I have said, by Regnard himself, much as I have told it to you. What I have omitted are the beautiful speeches the lovers make to each other, the admirable sentiments of Baba Hassan, and the delightful unreality of the whole thing. But there is no doubt of the facts. They were all three prisoners. De Prade was reported dead. His widow came home with Regnard, who promised to marry her; and then her husband turned up again. It is like reading a novelette by Cervantes, and it would be perfectly charming if only the writer had chosen to describe the daily life of a slave among the Moors, instead of treating us to his intrigues with Immona and Fatima. But people had not yet learned the charm of accurate description, and the romance of reality.

Regnard's travels in Lapland form a little book much more useful, because he found himself in a country where no Frenchman had yet penetrated. He gives us a lively account of the people, this time keeping himself and his conquests in the background altogether. He attends at the funeral of a celebrated Lapland priest of Tornea, Joannes Tornæus. At the bedside sits his widow weeping and crying. Round her a group of other women all lamenting together. Great silver vessels stand on the table, filled with wine and brandy. The widow stops her weeping at intervals, to make everybody drink. And so they weep and drink alternately. He

marks their superstition, how when one is ill, they beat the drum to know if he is going to recover; and if they are sure he is going to die, they make his last moments fly more rapidly and more pleasantly, by plying him with brandy, of which they partake themselves the more to excite their tears. And when he is dead they destroy his house to appease his *manes*. Then they observe unlucky days; they mix up Christianity with the worship of Thor; they offer sacrifices; they have sorcerers, and so on. Finally, with his companions, Regnard reaches the North Cape, climbs the mountain which gives them a view of the Northern Sea, and leaves a Latin inscription for the bears and the wolves to read. The inscription proclaims the greatness of the travellers:—

> Gallia nos genuit: vidit nos Africa; Gangem
> Hausimus, Europamque oculis lustravimus omnem:
> Casibus et variis acti terrâque marique
> Hic tandem stetimus, nobis ubi defuit orbis.

Returning from Lapland, Regnard visited Stockholm, Turkey, Hungary, and Germany, going back to Paris, where he bought a charge of royal treasurer, which he held for twenty years. His fortune was ample, his power of conversation great, his social position was established. And when, some time afterwards, he bought the estate of Grillon, where he spent his summers, he was able to fill his house with the best society of Paris, and to give his friends the most delightful life possible, full of music, feasting, dancing, love-making, and singing. It was in the last period of the Great King's life and already, in secret, the note of the Regency had been struck. Away in the country, hidden among the forests of Grillon, a free and unbridled life could be led, of which the world knew nothing, and where no Tartuffe

was allowed to penetrate. For Regnard was by conviction a pure Epicurean. What is it that life can give ?—

Grand' chère, vin délicieux,
Belle maison, liberté toute entière :
Bals, concerts, enfin, tout ce qui peut satisfaire
Le goût, les oreilles, les yeux :
Ici le moindre domestique
A du talent pour la musique.
* * * * *
Les hôtes même, en entrant au château,
Semblent du maître éprouver le génie.
Toujours société choisie :
Et, ce qui me paraît surprenant et nouveau,
Grand monde et bonne compagnie.

All this he had at Grillon, where he led the life he liked, singing and making love to the fair Tontine :—

Upon her face
A thousand dimples smile for me;
Of love the work, of love the grace;
Beside the rest you cannot see
Upon her face.

Her pretty lips
Are full of laughter and of mirth,
And all her words our wit eclipse :
Love makes his palace upon earth
Her pretty lips.

Her rounded throat
Of marble seems, that lies beneath.
No mortal yet has dared to note,
Save with the eyes of love and faith,
Her rounded throat.

Her tender voice
So sweetly strikes on lover's ear :
And when she sings the notes rejoice,
Once more the harmony to hear
Of her sweet voice.

Then all around,
Drink, drink a glass to fair Tontine.
Perhaps our lady may be found
To love—such things have sometimes been—
Us all around.

Grillon, indeed, was to be another monastery of Thélemé, the rules of which he gives:—

Pleasantly now to pass our days
With what the fates may lend us,
A monastery let us raise,
With Bacchus to befriend us.

And every one, or monk or nun,
Who fain would join our order,
Shall only prove his power of love
And merriment, to the warder.

The vows our brethren undertake
Shall bring no sorrow after;
Short prayers to read, long feasts to make,
And spend the days in laughter.

Temptation from us to remove,
And make all envy hated;
Our gold, our wine, our very love,
Shall be in common treated.

Each monk shall have his penitent
Obedient to injunction,
And show her, to his teaching bent,
The virtues of compunction.

Like some fair flower sweetly trained,
Her soul will grow in beauty;
While in her cell the holy saint
Still lectures her on duty.

And last, to show where here below
The true religious ease is,
Read evermore above the door:
"Here each lives as he pleases."

The sentiments of this Pantagruelian ballad are, indeed, deplorable; but one may at least admire the verse, and acknowledge that it shows the poet's true convictions. If the idea is borrowed from Rabelais, at least the theme loses nothing in the hands of Regnard.

It is very remarkable, if one may pass from this trifling to a serious remark, to note how very slowly the idea of wealth's responsibilities, of the duties that

the rich owe to the poor, has grown up in the world. Especially in this seventeenth century, men seem all supremely selfish. Out of all, only La Fontaine and Molière—perhaps, too, Saint Amant—are touched with the sense of sympathy. The rich man uses his wealth entirely to procure himself enjoyment: the poor man spends his life in the effort to procure wealth: men of genius flatter, cringe, and do *kotou*, to procure wealth and the means of enjoyment. Regnard, at once a rich man and a genius, spent his money in surrounding himself with all that life could give of physical and æsthetic pleasure; for the poor, the helpless, the suffering, he has no thought. Suffering, in all forms, is distasteful to the Epicurean, particularly those forms of suffering which are associated with poverty, ugliness, mean surroundings. He dislikes suffering so much that he will not see any if he can help it. Let it stay outside. Inside, let the violins and flutes play; let there be the flowing of wine: let the boys sing; let the ladies prattle; and in the intervals of these, when the muscles are tired of laughing, the ear fatigued with sweet sounds, let us go to our study and write the comedies, the satires, the verses of this artificial heaven which shall make us immortal.

For Regnard is a poet. Not, if you please, a great poet, but a poet of considerable vigour and abundant wit: second as a satirist to Boileau, and second as a dramatist to Molière. You will not, I apprehend, take pleasure in reading all his satires, but you may read one, that on Boileau-Despréaux. Boileau, you remember, wrote a Satire on Women, the poorest and weakest production of his pen. Regnard, who was not one of the great man's disciples, dared to write a counter-blast on husbands, at which Boileau chose to be in a

great rage. Whereupon Regnard wrote "The Tomb of Boileau," in which he supposed the poet to have expired in disgust at seeing another preferred to himself. These are his last words, addressed to his own verses:—

Dearer to me than mistress, love, or wife,
You who will give your author second life,
For the last time I see you—round my bed
Already Death his horrid wings has spread.
Yet I die happy, since an age depraved
Sees, without horror, taste despised and braved;
Since France, ungrateful, faithless, false, untrue,
Yawns o'er my verse, and yearns for idols new.
And I, so long the king of phrase and word,
Have now to witness Regnard's rhymes preferred.
Regnard, who ten years spent from shore to shore,
In Lapland wandering from the Moorish oar;
Regnard, who knows no classic rules aright,
Who eats, and drinks, and gambles day and night.
Was it for this that in my youthful toil,
By the pale glimmer of the rancid oil,
Bowed over dusty tomes, I learned—the curse
Of all my life—to hammer out a verse?
Is it on drinking that our poets hope?
And is Parnassus but a flowery slope?
Yet Regnard, Regnard, flies from hand to hand,
I heaped, meanwhile, on every old bookstand.
Oh! cruel stroke of fate! Despair and rage!
When Herculean toils have brought old age,
By a new athlete vanquished, see me lie—
My life too long for honour; let me die.

It is pleasant, after reading the above, to remember that Boileau and Regnard were subsequently reconciled, and said kind things of each other. "Regnard is only a mediocre poet," said some one to Boileau, after the reconciliation. "Il n'est pas médiocrement gai," said the old satirist. While Regnard, making amends, dedicated his comedy, the "Menechmes," to Boileau, calling himself his disciple, and saying:—

Favori des neuf sœurs, qui sur le mont Parnasse,
De l'aveu d'Apollon, marches si près d'Horace.

Which is as it should be, and unkind things are better said of men when they are dead than when they are living. At least they cause less annoyance. Let us all agree to say nothing cruel of friend or enemy till he is fairly under the sod. Think, then, of the pleasures of uncontradicted calumny.

In placing Regnard next to Molière, it must be understood that there is an immense space between the two. Regnard is animated, lively, gay, but he wants that substratum of sadness which accompanies the higher forms of genius. His plays, too, are quite conventional, impossible, and unreal. Take only one, the best—best because it is the liveliest and lightest—the "Folies Amoureuses." Eraste has returned from Italy: Agathe, under the tutelage of Albert, her jealous and suspicious guardian, discovers the return of her lover, and, accompanied by the inevitable Lisette, goes into the garden, where all the action takes place, in the early morning, in the hope of meeting him. Lovers, of course, get up always at daybreak. Here she is discovered by Albert, the guardian, and is sent indoors, while Lisette is first abused and then coaxed. Crispin, the valet of Eraste, sent to see how things lie, is intercepted by Albert the jealous:—

> Vous me portez tout l'air de ces fripons
> Qui rôdent pour entrer la nuit dans les maisons.

Crispin pretends to be a chemist—doctor, natural philosopher—and makes up a long story. Albert goes into the house, and Eraste has a short conference with his servant. That is all the first act. In the second, Albert declares his love to Agathe, and Eraste introduces himself. Crispin is there in his pretended character of chemist. Agathe becomes mad suddenly, and

comes in dressed as Scaramouche, playing a guitar, and singing, though Albert only half believes in the imposture. She slips a letter into the hand of Eraste, entreating him to carry her off. In the third act Agathe appears first as an old woman, then as a dragoon. Crispin declares that the only way to cure her is to transfer the madness to another person. He transfers it, by magic, to Eraste, who immediately draws his sword and threatens Albert. Albert flees from the madman: the lovers make haste to escape in the opposite direction, and when Albert timidly returns he finds them gone.

Well—that is all. A plot so very likely to happen in real life; quite simple, too. It makes three acts, the liveliest possible; and one can quite understand the pleasure with which the jealousy of the guardian, the pertness of the maid, the impudence of the valet, the coolness of the lover, and the subtlety of the young lady would be received. And you have just these five characters, each perfect, and each having its own full share of the piece.

Regnard wrote some seventeen such pieces, every one of which, impossible as all are, may be read with pleasure. He died at the age of fifty-five, being killed, according to one account, by taking medicines too powerful, after over-eating himself. "Qui ne se plaît point à Regnard," said Voltaire, "n'est pas digne d'admirer Molière." Which judgment will serve us for his epitaph.

Chapter XVII.

GRESSET.

Alas! poor shepherd.—*As You Like It.*

IT is the fate of some writers to be remembered by a single piece, that of most not to be remembered at all. So that Gresset, whose literary baggage consists of tragedies, comedies, and verses of all kinds, may be considered fortunate, inasmuch as the world yet reads one of his poems, his first and best. It is a whimsical, absurd, extravagant, mirthful little poem, all about nuns and their ways, full of the innocent babble, the extravagant trifling, of the sisters, shut up with nothing to think about but the little gossip, all about nothing, of the convent. This wonderful production was the work of a serious and sober young *professeur* entirely given up to his work of teaching, never seen in society, of studious and silent life, and selected for the scholastic profession by the Jesuits his masters, because he was so quiet, so good, so *doux*. And yet, at the age of twenty-five, when the first hot youth had been passed without a sin, and all seemed to promise a sober manhood devoted to Latin grammar, this young man, forsaking the traditions of his youth,

must needs write and print "Ver-Vert." Worse than that, three editions followed each other in rapid succession, and all France began to talk of the young *professeur* who knew the ways of the nuns so well, and could rhyme about them so glibly. The Jesuits, alarmed at the gaiety of the verse, and unable to see anything to laugh at in nuns, sent the offender for a term to La Flèche. After a brief exile, he returned to Paris, where he brought out his "Chartreuse," a long account of a garret in a college, with rambling remarks upon everything, remarks that tumble headlong from the poet's brain, not original, not striking, and certainly not calculated to do any harm to even a child. But the order were scandalized, and took up the matter seriously. It is truly difficult to fathom the delicacy of the ecclesiastical mind. For when the lady superior of the Visitation nuns found the following lines in "Ver-Vert"—

> Désir de fille est un feu qui dévore,
> Désir de nonne est cent fois pis encore—

she made a grand state affair of it, and wrote to her brother, a man in high place. He complained to the Jesuit superiors, and Cardinal Fleury wrote to the lieutenant of police on the subject:—

> Here is a letter from the Père de Linyères, on the subject of the young man whose three little works you have sent me. That about the parrot is extremely pretty, and much superior to the other two; but it is libertine in tone, and will certainly give trouble to the Jesuits if they do not take care. All the young fellow's talent seems turned to the side of license, and such geniuses never get corrected. The best plan would be to expel him from the society.

Poor Gresset!—all his talents devoted to licentious writing! And he so religious, and "Ver-Vert" so innocent. The "libertine tone" is almost, save for a touch

here and a touch there, what might have been written by any sprightly young girl. It sometimes approaches dangerously near to things difficult to handle . . . we are almost among the breakers—but see, a turn, a break in the sense, the slightest possible smile, the least little light in the eye, such as girls use to convey their little shades of meaning, and we are sailing away again in the open, free from shoals and far from the dangers of the reef. Libertine? The cardinal is really too severe. But it makes one reflect on the admirable freedom of the press, the faithful representation of human life, the perfect innocence of mirth, and the abundant material for it, which we should have did the priests, those lambs of uncompromising virtue, command the right of publication.

And thus Gresset was expelled the order of the Jesuits. He had been in the society all his life, and he was afraid of that cold world without, into which he had never ventured. He took off the Jesuits' robe, laid it down with a sigh, and went out of his college crying. He was but a child, as guileless as any nun; as ignorant of the ways of men; as innocent of their ambitions. Presently he went into the salons of Paris, looked round him, reflected, observed, and wrote his comedy of "Le Méchant."

It was the second literary event in his life; and it marks the second period of his education. But it stamps him with the brand of mediocrity. He is second-rate. And though the comedy brought him into the French Academy, got him pensions, and increased his reputation, it could not live. But he went on to write more dramas, and to pour out verses with a fatal facility; he never had the least control over his pen, and now that the "first sprightly running" was over, and there were

only the lees of thought left, his lines are tiresome and feeble indeed.

But presently he grew weary of Paris and the salons, and began to sigh for a country life. Moreover, albeit expelled from the society of the Jesuits, he was a man in whom the religious sentiment was too strong to permit the attractions of Parisian life. He had pensions to the amount of ten thousand francs a year, and with this income he retired to his native town of Amiens, where he married and lived in the practice of religious duties for the last thirty years of his life, from time to time going up to Paris. Presently his religious prejudices received a grievous stimulus. Do you know the wretched story of La Barre? Let me recal it, for it is good to remind ourselves what the sacerdotal spirit always has been and always is. He was a young gentleman not twenty years of age, grandson of a greatly distinguished French general. His father having dissipated all his fortune, the boy was placed under the charge of an aunt, Abbess of Villancourt, who brought him up and, when he was nineteen years of age, solicited for him a commission in a cavalry regiment, which would have been granted in acknowledgement of his grandfather's services, but for the miserable events which happened. There was a certain Duval de Sarcourt, a man at the time already sixty years of age, who took it into his wicked old head to fall in love with the abbess. His suit was treated with contempt, and young La Barre taking up the cudgels for his aunt, did all in his power to make De Sarcourt ridiculous. Thereupon, the latter conceived the idea of revenge. He learned, to his great delight, that a year before, La Barre with another boy of the same age, named D'Etalonde, had actually being guilty of the crime of remaining

uncovered, whether by accident or not is uncertain, during a certain religious procession. This was actually *all that the poor boys had done*. He made himself the denouncer to justice of this horrible crime, painting it in the blackest colours of blasphemy and atheism. Chance lent him another weapon. The bran new cross, just put up on the bridge of Abbeville, was found mutilated. De Sarcourt accused La Barre and D'Etalonde of having done this as well. He raked up, besides, all the past history, such as it had been, of the two lads, and finding that they had once sung certain light verses at a supper, added this to the two other crimes. Then came the Bishop Dorleans de la Motte, whom Gresset called *dignitate clarus, pietate clarior*. He had been a good man. During the whole of a long life he had been a model of every Christian virtue. But the crime that he was about to commit robbed him of all title to respect. For he joined in the cry and issued admonitions to his flock, which had the effect of turning wonder into fury and of fanning into a raging fire the smouldering embers of fanaticism. De Sarcourt pushed on the case, forced the magistrates to take it up, and taking every advantage that the bigotry of the people, roused by their bishop, lent him, brought evidence from all sides, and succeeded in having the boys tried. When the evidence was collected, his own son was found implicated in the twopenny business of a few young men's frivolities. He made him escape, and pushed on the matter to the end. The tribunal of Abbeville, wise and excellent magistrates, found the two guilty. They were sentenced to have their right hands cut off, their tongues cut out at the roots, and then to be burned alive. D'Etalonde escaped to Prussia, where Voltaire got him a commission in Frederick's army. He, at least, would henceforth

cherish a lively remembrance of ecclesiastical charity. As for La Barre, he was not so fortunate. He was put to the torture, but confessed nothing. Then his friends got the punishment commuted. He was to be beheaded before being burned, and he was spared the agony of mutilation. They brought him to the place of execution, this hapless boy, his limbs twisted and racked by the torture, but his spirit unbroken. On his breast they placed a placard, calling him "impious, blasphemous, sacrilegious, execrable." His last words expressed a sort of confused wonder that he should suffer so much for having done so little. "I did not think," he said, "that they could put a young gentleman to death for such a trifle." So De Sarcourt was avenged. That is, he was still ridiculous as regards the love matter—as he always had been—and now he was infamous as well. As for the bishop, it is pleasant to read that the last years of his life were tortured and agonized by the constant spectacle of that unhappy boy and the memory of the part he had taken. Voltaire wrote a burning account of the whole business. But neither infamy nor remorse nor indignation could bring back to life poor young La Barre.

It was only a hundred years ago. The boys had remained covered while the Capuchin monks carried some mediæval trumpery in procession. Only a hundred years ago. Let us thank GOD for the French Revolution!

As for Gresset, the lesson was not lost on him. He thought of his two lines in "Ver-Vert," and trembled. He fell into an abject terror. If these things were done in the green tree, what should be done in the dry?—

> Désir de fille est un feu qui dévore,
> Désir de nonne est cent fois pis encore.

If La Barre were tortured, strangled, and burned for not taking off his hat to a file of greasy monks, what should be done to him for those appalling lines?

Désir de nonne . . . .

He resolved what he would do—safety before everything. Let honour, self-respect, consideration for his reputation, all go to the winds. The sinner would save his body alive. Any humiliation was better than the very disagreeable *quart d'heure* necessarily spent in getting burned, a thing impossible to be hurried over. He wrote an abjuration to the bishop of his title of dramatic author, professed his unfeigned regret for having written verses so light, asked pardon of the Virgin Mary for his worldly comedies, and then sat down relieved and happy. Piron and Voltaire wrote epigrams on his conversion. But that mattered little. Said Voltaire:—

Gresset, doué du double privilége
D'être au collége un bel-esprit mondain
Et dans le monde un homme de collége,
Gresset, dévot, jadis petit badin,
Sanctifié par ses palinodies,
Enfin prétend avoir componction
Qu'il composa jadis des comédies,
Dont à la Vierge il demande pardon;
Gresset se trompe: il n'est pas si coupable:
Un vers heureux et d'un ton agréable
Ne suffit pas: il faut de l'action,
De l'intérêt, du comique, du fable,
Des mœurs du temps un portrait véritable,
Pour consommer cette œuvre du démon.

Gresset has no more history. Henceforth he is a *cagot*, an abject slave to the priests, a grovelling observer of outward rites and ceremonies, trembling lest a Pater should be omitted, careful to obey in the smallest particulars. Let us read his "Ver-Vert."

At Nevers once, not long ago,
The pet of certain sisters there,
Flourished a parrot, one so fair,
So trained in all a bird can know,
As to deserve a better fate,
Did happiness on merit wait.
Ver-Vert, such was the parrot's name,
Young yet, and innocent of wrong,
Transplanted from some Indian stream,
Was placed these cloistered nuns among.
Bright-hued was he, and gay, but sage;
Frank, as befitted childhood's age,
And free from evil thought or word:
In short he was the very bird
To choose for such a sacred cage.

Needs not to tell what love he won,
What cares received, from every nun;
How, next to the confessor, he
Reigned in each heart; and though it be
Sinful to weakness to succumb,
Ver-Vert the bird was first with some.
He shared in these serene retreats
The sirups, jellies, and the sweets
Made by the sisters to excite
The holy father's appetite.
For him 'twas free to do or say
Whate'er he pleased—'twas still his way.
No circle could be pleasant where
There was not in the midst Ver-Vert,
To whistle, chirrup, sing, and fly;
And all the while with modesty,
Just like a novice, timid yet,
And ever fearful to forget;
Never, unquestioned, silence broke,
Yet answered all, though twenty spoke;
Just as great Cæsar, between whiles,
Wrote all at once five different styles.

At night his pleasure was to roam
From one to other for a home;
Happy, too happy, was the nun
Whose cell his wayward choice had won.
He wandered here and wandered there,
But, truth to say, 'twas very rare
That fancy led him to the cell
Where any ancient dame might dwell.

No, rather would his choice be laid
Where some young sister's couch was made;
There would he sleep the long night through,
Till daylight broke and slumbers flew;
And then, so privileged and free,
The sister's first toilette might see.
Toilette I say, but whisper low,
Somewhere I've read, but do not know,
Nuns' mirrors must be quite as true
As, ladies, is required for you;
And, just as fashion in the world
Must here be fringed and there be curled,
So also in the simple part
Of veils and bands there lies an art;
For that light throng of frivolous imps
Who scale o'er walls and creep through bars,
Can give to stiffest veils and gimps
A grace that satin never wears.
Of course you guess, at such a school,
Ver-Vert, by parrot's instinct-rule,
Endowed with speech, his ladies took
For pattern; and, except at meat,
When all the nuns in silence eat,
Talked fast and long, and like a book.
He was not, mark, one of these light
And worldly birds, corrupted quite
By secular concerns, and who
Know mundane follies through and through;
Ver-Vert was piously inclined;
A fair soul led by innocence,
Unsullied his intelligence,
No rude words lingered in his mind.
But then he knew each canticle,
Oremus, and the colloquies,
His *Benedicite* said well,
The *Notre mère*, and charities.
Instructed still, he grows more wise,
The pupil with the teacher vies;
He imitates their very tones,
The softened notes, the pious groans,
The long-drawn sighs, by which they prove
How they adore, and how they love;
And knows at length—a holy part—
The Breviary all by heart.

* * * * *

But fame is full of perils; well
In lowly lot obscure to dwell.
Success too great, without reverse,
Oft makes the moral nature worse.
Thy name, immortal parrot, spread
Still wider, till by sad fate led,
It reached as far as Nantes. Here stood
The chief house of the sisterhood.
Now not the last, as might be guessed,
Are nuns to hear of what goes on;
And chattering still, like all the rest,
Of what was said and what was done,
They heard of Ver-Vert, wondered much,
They talked and envied, talked and sighed
(Great though his powers, his virtues such,
Had been by rumour magnified),
Till last a common longing fell
On all alike this miracle
Themselves to see. A girl's desire
Is like a flame that leaps and burns;
But ah! a fiercer, brighter fire,
Is when a nun with longing yearns.
To Nevers fly all hearts; of nought
But Ver-Vert can the convent think.
Could he—ah! could he here be brought!
The Loire is swift; ships do not sink.
Oh! bid him come, if but to show
For one day what a bird can know.
They write to Nevers; then, how long
Before an answer? Twelve whole days?
So long? So far? Alas! 'tis wrong.
We sleep no more; pale every face,
And sister Cécile wastes apace.

* * * * *

On board the bark that on the wave
Bore Ver-Vert from his patrons' care
Were three fair nymphs, two soldiers brave,
A nurse, a monk, a Gascon pair.
Strange company and sad, I ween,
For Ver-Vert, best of pious birds.
Innocent quite of what might mean
Their strange garb and their stranger words,
He listened, 'mazed at first. The style
Was new, and yet the words were old.
It was not gospel, truly; while
The jokes they made, the tales they told,

Were marked by absence of those sweet
Ejaculations, vows, and prayers,
Which *they* would make and he repeat.
No Christian words are these he hears.
The bold dragoons with barrack slang
Confused his head and turned his brain;
To unknown deities they sang
In quite an unaccustomed strain.
The Gascons and the ladies three
Conversed in language odd but free;
The boatmen all in chorus swore
Oaths never heard by him before.
And, sad and glum, Ver-Vert sat still
In silence, though against his will.

But presently the bird they spy,
And for their own diversion try
To make him talk. The monk begins
With some light questions on his sins;
Ver-Vert looks up, and with a sigh,
"Ave! my sister," makes reply:
And as they roar with laughter long
Suspects, somehow, he's answered wrong.
Proud was his spirit, until then
Unchecked by scoff of vulgar men;
And so he could not brook to see
His words exposed to contumely.
Alas! with patience, Ver-Vert lost
The first bloom of his innocence.
That gone, how little did it cost
To curse the nuns and their pretence
To teach him French? well might they laugh,
The nuns, he found, had left out half—
The half, too, most for beauty made,
The nervous tone, the delicate shade;
To learn this half—the better lore—
He speaks but little, thinks the more.
At first the parrot, so far wise,
Perceives that all he learned before,
The chants, the hymns, the languid sighs,
And all the language of the nuns,
Must be forgotten, and at once.
In two short days the task was done,
And soldiers' wit 'gainst prayer of nun,
So fresh, so bright, so pleasant seemed,
That in less time than could be dreamed

(Too soon youth lends itself to evil),
He cursed and swore like any devil.
By steps, the proverb says, we go
From bad to worse, from sin to crime;
Ver-Vert reversed the rule, and so
Served no noviciate's tedious time.
Full-fledged professor of all sin,
Whate'er they said he marked within;
Ran their whole dictionary through,
And all the wicked language knew;
Till one day, at an oath suppressed,
He finished it, with swelling breast.
Loud was the praise, great the applause;
Poor Ver-Vert proudly looked around,
He, too, could speak by boatman's laws,
He, too, this glorious half had found.
Then to his genius giving play,
He cursed and swore the live-long day.
Fatal example this, how pride
Young hearts from heaven may turn aside.

* * * * *

The boat arrives, and at the stage
A sister waits, to take the cage.
Since the first letter sent, she sits
With eyes turned ever up the stream,
And watching every sail that flits
Across the wave, each, in her dream,
The bark that brings the saint Ver-Vert.
He knew—corrupted bird—aright,
By that half-opened eye, that bare
And scanty dress, those gloves so white,
The cross—by all these tokens good—
He knew, he knew the sisterhood.
Seeing her there, he trembled first,
And then in undertones he cursed,
For much he feared, and much he sighed,
Thinking that all the blasphemies
In which he took such joy and pride
Would change again to litanies.
And then he shrieked; she seized the cage,
In vain he pecked in useless rage;
Bit the poor sister here and there,
For still she bore him to his fate,
Arrived within the convent gate,
And told the advent of Ver-Vert.

The rumour ran. They ring the bells,
The sisters troop from choir and cells:
"'Tis he, my sister, come at last."
They fly, they run, the old forget
The burden of the winters past;
Some who were never known as yet
To haste their steps, came running now
All joyous, eager all, and bright,
As happy as if Ver-Vert's sight
Released them all from convent vow.

They see at last, and cannot tire,
That form so full of youth and fire:
For Ver-Vert, though now steeped in harm,
Had not therefore become less fair;
That warlike eye, that dandy air,
Lent him at least a novel charm.
Ah, heaven! why on a traitor's face
Waste all this beauty, all this grace?
The sisters, charmed with such a bird,
Press round him, chattering all at once,
As is the way, I'm told, with nuns;
That even thunder fell unheard.
He during all the clatter sat,
Deigning no word, or this, or that.
Only with strange libertine gaze,
Rolling his eyes from nun to nun.
First scandal. Not without amaze,
The holy ladies saw how one
So pious, could so rudely stare.
Then came the Prioress, and there
First questioned him. For answer all,
Disdainfully he spread his wings,
Careless what horror might befall,
And thus replied to these poor things,
"Par le corbleu! Lord! Lord, what fools!"
At this infringement of the rules
Which mere politeness teaches, "Fie,
My dearest brother," one began.
In mocking tones he made reply,
Till cold her very life-blood ran.
"Great Heaven! Is this a sorcerer?
Is this the saintly praying bird
They boast so much of at Nevers,
Ver-Vert, of whom so much is heard?

Is this—" Here Ver-Vert, sad to say,
Took up the tale in his new way.
He imitated first the young,
The novices with chattering tongue;
Their babble and their little ways,
Their yawning fits at times of praise.
Then turning to the ancient ones,
Whose virtues brought respect to Nantes,
He mocked at large their nasal chants,
Their coughs, their grumblings, and their groans.
But worse to follow. Filled with rage,
He beat his wings, and bit the cage,
He thundered sacrilegious words
Ne'er heard before from beak of birds;
All that he'd learned on board the ship
Headlong from that corrupted lip
Fell mid the crowd—words strange to see
(Mostly beginning with a *d*)
Hovered about his impious beak—
The young nuns thought him talking Greek,
Till with an oath so full, so round,
That even the youngest understood,
He ended. At the frightful sound
Multivious fled the sisterhood.

* * * * *

Ver-Vert, replaced his cage within,
The nuns resolved without delay
To purge the place of heinous sin,
And send the peccant bird away.
The pilgrim asks for nought beside,
He is proscribed, pronounced accurst,
Guilty pronounced of having tried
The virtue of the nuns; called worst
Of parrots. All in order due
Attest the truth of this decree,
Yet weep that one so fair to view
So very black of heart should be.
He goes, by the same sister borne,
But now with feelings changed and sad.
Ver-Vert of all his honours shorn,
Is yet resigned, and even glad.
So is brought back to Nevers. Here,
Alas! alas! new scandals come.
Untaught by shame, untouched by fear,
With wicked words he welcomes home.

To these kind ladies manifests,
  Reading the dreadful letter through,
With boatmen's oaths and soldiers' jests,
  That all their sisters' wrath was true.
What steps to take? Their cheeks are pale,
  Their senses overwhelmed with grief,
With mantles long, with double veil,
  In council high they seek relief.
Nine ancient nuns the conclave make—
  Nine centuries assembled seem—
Here without hope for old love's sake,
  Far from the girls whose eyes would stream
At thought of hurting him, the bird,
Chained to his perch, is duly heard.
No good he has to say. They vote.
Two sibyls write the fatal word
Of death; and two, more kindly taught,
Propose to send him back again
To that profane stream whence he came,
Brought by a Brahmin. These in vain—
The rest resolve, in common sense,
Two months of total abstinence.
Three of retreat, of silence four—
Garden and biscuits, board and bed,
And play—shall be prohibited.
Nor this the whole; in all the space
Forbidden to see a pretty face.
A jailer harsh, a guardian grim,
With greatest care they chose for him,
The oldest, ugliest, sourest nun,
An ape in veils, a skeleton,
Bent double with her eighty years—
Would move the hardest sinner's tears.

So passed Ver-Vert his term; in spite
  Of all his jailor's jealous care,
The sisters gave him some delight,
  And now and then improved his fare.
But chained and caged, in dungeon fast,
Bitter the sweetest almonds taste.
Taught by his sufferings to be wise,
Touched, may be, by their tearful eyes,
The contrite parrot tries to turn
  Repentant thoughts from things of ill;
Gives all his mind again to learn,
  Recovers soon his ancient skill,

And shows as pious as a dean.
Sure the conversion is not feigned,
The ancient conclave meet again,
And to his prison put an end.
Oh! happy day when Ver-Vert, free,
Returns the sisters' pet to be.
A real fête, a day of joy,
With no vexation, no annoy,
Each moment given up to mirth,
And all by love together bound.
But ah! the fleeting joy of earth,
Unstable, untrustworthy found.
The songs, and chants, and joyful hours,
The dormitory wreathed with flowers,
Full liberty, a tumult sweet,
And nothing, nothing that could tell
Of sorrow hiding 'neath their feet,
Of death advancing to their cell.
Passing too quick from diet rude,
From plain dry bread to richer food,
With sugar tempted, crammed with sweets,
Tempted with almonds and such meats,
Poor Ver-Vert feels his roses change
Into the cypress dark and strange.
He droops, he sinks. In vain they try
By every art to stave off fate.
Their very love makes Ver-Vert worse,
Their cares his death accelerate,
Victim of love, of love he tires,
And with a few last words expires.
These last words, very hard to hear,
Vain consolation, pious were.

Chapter XVIII:

CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS.—A DRAMA.

He that has but impudence
To all things has a fair pretence;
And, put among his wants but shame,
To all the world may make his claim.

Act I.

AN adventurer of the last century had a choice between many roads, all of which might lead to fortune. He could become a financier like Law and Duvernay-Paris; or a gambler, like Casanova; or a *littérateur*, like Bernardin de Saint-Pierre; or a charlatan, like Cagliostro. Caron de Beaumarchais chose *all* these roads; he was financier, gambler, author; he gave to the character of adventurer a universality that it lacked before; he was the grandest, as he was the last, of his tribe.

Remark, to begin with, that an adventurer has not only to dare greatly, but to pretend greatly. If he is a *bourgeois*, he pretends to be a noble; if needy, he pretends to be wealthy; if of dissolute habits, he affects the highest morality. The one grand rule of his life is the advance-

ment of his own interests. Many men lay down this rule; few have the courage so to disregard modesty, friendship, honour, and self-respect, as to abide by it; fewer still have the audacity at the outset of self-assertion. For this is, after all, the greatest element in success. You must not only believe in yourself (any poor broken-down drudge can do so much), but you must also make the world believe in you. And I recommend this faithful history of Beaumarchais as a perfect exemplar to penniless and ambitious youths, a pattern of what an adventurer ought to be. He is styled by the great nickname-giver, Carlyle, a "withered music-master," the period selected for the nickname being that when he was winning his great cause. No epithet could be more unfortunate, because, in the first place, Beaumarchais was then only forty, and did not wither early, but quite the contrary; and in the second place, he never was a music-master at all.

The life of Pierre-Augustin Caron, which divides itself naturally into three acts and some eight *tableaux*, began at Paris in 1732, his father being a watchmaker. There were six children, five of them girls, all clever, sprightly, fond of literary trifling, and passionately fond of their only brother. He had no other education than that of a private school, which he left at the age of thirteen, having acquired little beside the art of penmanship, a taste for literature, and a certain precocious facility in the manufacture of verses. So early as this, too, did he begin to feel that fatal passion which was destined to bring him into so many scrapes. He fell in love, was received coldly, and threatened to commit suicide, consenting to live only on the supplications of all his sisters together. Apprenticed to his father, we hear rumours of late hours and extravagance, for which he was exiled

for a space from the paternal roof. Then, on promise of amendment, he returned to be the industrious apprentice. And then for six or seven years hard and persevering work at the mystery of watchmaking, his only recreations being to write verses, practise music, and get up little theatrical entertainments with his sisters. Industry was rewarded, for at the age of twenty-one the young fellow invented a new escapement in the construction of watches, the first and most creditable event in his life. The history of this man is a series of grand effects, like a firework display. Just as you think it is finished, bang goes another rocket, and the next moment the whole sky is lit up with the splendour of a fire cascade. As soon as young Caron's invention became known it was imitated, and the discovery claimed by a rival watchmaker. Pierre-Augustin wrote an indignant letter to the "Mercure," the first of all his "Mémoires," claiming his rights and demanding that the Academy of Sciences should decide as to the real inventor. Everything is given to him who dares to ask. The Academy consented to investigate the question, and decided in favour of young Caron. He was then appointed "watchmaker to the king," made watches for all the royal family, took them to court, explained his novel escapement, and fairly placed his foot on the lowest round of Fortune's ladder. He was tall, shapely, of polished manners, not embarrassed by any *mauvaise honte*, bright-eyed, and with clear-cut features, full of gaiety and high spirits, in fact, a handsome young fellow, and a complete coxcomb. A lady presently falls in love with him, the first of many ladies. She is the wife of a certain old M. Franquet, *contrôleur-clerc de l'office de la maison du roi*, thirty years of age, and beautiful, so that when she took her watch to the

shop to be repaired, the young watchmaker begged permission to bring it home himself. He brought it, he called again, he made himself agreeable to M. Franquet, he became the friend of the house, and in a short time, the old clerk being desirous of repose, Caron bought his post at the cost of a small annuity, became by right of the situation a gentleman, and gave up the watchmaking trade. This was the second step in advance. Then, M. Franquet being good enough to die, Pierre-Augustin married his widow, and from some small estate of hers assumed the name of Beaumarchais. But his wife too died a year afterwards, and the estate went to somebody else, so that he was left again with nothing but his new territorial name, which he retained, and his little post at court.

It was then that he became known to the king's daughters. These four ladies, whom Carlyle has quite needlessly held up to derision with the vulgar nicknames given them by their father, possessed great accomplishments, besides a considerable *fond* of good-nature. Madame Adelaide, for instance, was able to play every instrument that ever was invented. Music, indeed, in their monotonous lives, was their chief, if not their only pleasure. They heard of the young *contrôleur-clerc's* musical abilities, and expressed a wish to hear him play the harp. He came; he touched his instrument, then newly introduced, with the skill of David, moved their hearts, and became their friend. Henceforth he was the principal performer in the family concerts, which the princesses gave every week, at which only the king, the queen, the dauphin, and a very few persons of the highest distinction, were invited to attend. Perhaps he gave himself airs in this court favour; perhaps it was only envy that inspired the lively hatred with which he

was regarded by the courtiers generally. One of them once stopped him coming from the princesses in all the bravery of his new court suit, and handing him his watch begged that he would look at it. "Monsieur," said young Beaumarchais, "I am sorry to say that since I have given up the trade I am become exceedingly maladroit"—thereon dropping the watch on the floor. "I told you so." This kind of persecution is quite easy and simple; effective, too, for though one may laugh it off, it has its sting, and no butterfly cares to be reminded that he was once a grub. There was only one way to stop it, and Beaumarchais, in spite of strict laws against duelling, challenged one of his persecutors, fought him, and ran him through the body. The gallant young chevalier his adversary died, refusing, gentleman as he was, to name the man who had killed him. Beaumarchais told his princesses, who told the king, and Louis promised to overlook it unless it were legally brought before his notice. So the persecution ceased, Beaumarchais remaining about the princesses, fetching and carrying for them, playing the harp, and arranging their concerts. His father and sisters were in ecstasies at the splendour of his success. "What have I done," writes poor old Caron, proud and fond, "that God should have given me such a son?"[1] Meantime the great and glorious son never forgot to send in his little bill for general services rendered to the princesses.

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[1] "I think," he goes on to say, "that God can confer no greater favour on a father of virtue and sensibility than to give him such a son. . . . . In my intervals of suffering I have been reading 'Grandison,' and in how many things did I find a real resemblance between Grandison and my son. Father of thy sisters, friend and benefactor of thy father! If England, I said to myself, has its Grandison, France has its Beaumarchais."

Twenty years before this—we are now about 1760—Voltaire made the discovery that a man must be either an anvil or a hammer. Paris-Duvernay made him the former. In the same way the same man made Beaumarchais, who never had the least taste for the *rôle* of anvil, also a hammer. It was in return for a favour Beaumarchais did for him. For M. Paris-Duvernay had established the *École Militaire*, and now, after spending years of trouble over it, saw it drooping daily for want of royal patronage. Would Beaumarchais get the princesses to visit the place? He did. Not only that, but the princesses, at his instigation, persuaded the king to go too, and the *École* was saved. It was in gratitude for this that Duvernay made Beaumarchais a financier, taught him, that is, his own art of making a fortune out of nothing. Under his instructions, and in partnership with the old fox, the young one began the glorious game of shoddy contracts. To help himself in getting them, he bought the title of king's secretary, which gave him the rank of nobility, told his father to take his name off the shopfront, and then, making a still higher bid, applied to be allowed to purchase a vacant post of Grand Ranger, valued at £20,000, Duvernay lending him the money, which was to be repaid out of army contracts. But young Caron was getting on too fast, and the rangers rose as one man, protesting against his admission into their body. Beaumarchais made an unsuccessful attempt to overrule their opposition, triumphantly proved that this ranger was the son of a barber, that of a wool-winder, a third of a second-hand jeweller—all trades below the rank of the watch-making mystery; and then, for it was no time to hesitate at a few falsehoods, declared that it was many years since his father gave up trade; that he had an

uncle a chevalier of St.-Louis, and that his grandfather had been an officer of engineers—we never hear of these illustrious relations again. But it was no use, and he had to content himself with the captaincy of the Warren of the Louvre, an office in which he exercised magisterial control over trespassers, fences, encroachments, and poachers in the woods outside Paris.

In the year 1764 he went to Madrid, nominally to visit a sister, really to look after certain projects. Duvernay provided him with introductions, so that he was received at the embassy, and gave him letters of credit for 200,000 francs, which he was only to use for advancing the schemes of plunder. These were many, and in the name of his partner and himself, Beaumarchais proposed to the astonished Spanish government that they should grant him, first, exclusive rights of trade with Louisiana, next, the exclusive right of supplying the Spanish colonies with negroes—he had written, only the year before, the most beautiful pamphlet possible on the evils of slavery; thirdly, that he should be authorized to colonize the Sierra Morena; fourthly, he laid before them a plan by which Duvernay and Co. would undertake to victual the whole Spanish army; and lastly, half-a-dozen plans for advancing, in the most disinterested manner, the cause of agriculture and commerce in Spain. Everything in this man is admirable; but most admirable of all is the grandeur of his schemes. He sticks at nothing. He will get slaves for a continent, victual an army, conduct the whole trade of a state. Never was a man so versatile and so audacious. The Spanish government, taken aback at first by the quick-witted Frenchman, hardly knew what or how to refuse. Meantime he goes about among his great friends, Lord Rochford and others,

playing the guitar, telling stories, picking up Spanish melodies, laughing, gambling—he tells his father how careful he is not to lose, and how angry the Russian ambassador is because he wins—and making love. And then, too, he has a little family business to arrange. One Clavijo, engaged to his sister, a milliner in Madrid, refused to keep his promise, and broke off the match. Beaumarchais, not content with personally abusing the man, actually tried to make an affair of state about it, and, though it seems too absurd, even penetrated to the king's presence with his complaints. Clavijo was dismissed his post, and the poor little milliner remained a maid.

The Spanish negociations failed, Spain preferring to find her own negroes, to victual her own army, to colonize her own waste lands, and to carry on her own trade. So the discomfited financier retreated across the frontier, and without wasting time over laments, began new schemes of plunder and glory. It was at this period that he fell in love with the St. Domingo heiress. Pauline was charming: Pauline had a sugar estate worth two millions: Pauline was ready to listen to his vows. The courtship went on at fever-heat, until the lover made the fatal discovery that there was a mortgage to the full value of the estate. After that his ardour visibly declined, and his "levities," as sister Julie charitably called them, began again. Still, things might turn out well after all. Suppose that Pauline would wait till news could come from St. Domingo? She consented to wait, but learning by degrees that her lover was not the perfect being she once thought him, she listened to another, the ungrateful Chevalier de S——, whom, sad to tell, Beaumarchais had brought to the house for the express purpose of making love to Julie. One morning the perfidious pair quietly stole off to-

gether and got married. Beaumarchais flew into quite a vulgar rage, and after vowing a vengeance, never executed, against the bridegroom, sat down and—*made out his bill*, charges for time and money expended in the service of Mademoiselle Pauline. It came to 24,000 francs, for the angry lover omitted nothing. Pauline gave him a written promise, but never paid anything, because in a short twelvemonth she was a penniless widow, and Beaumarchais had forgotten his rage, being in fact much too busy a man to sit down and brood over his wrath. It is only your sluggish-blooded creature who nurses his anger and bides his time. Beaumarchais, once recovered from his very natural wrath, laughed, took himself off to new "levities," and forgot all about it.

It was in 1765 that he came back from Spain, then thirty-two years of age, and it was in 1767 that he brought out his first piece at the Comédie Française, the "Eugénie," a dismal, lachrymose piece, dull and sentimental, for the author had not yet struck the real vein. The "Deux Amis," which followed, was no better. "M. de Beaumarchais," said Collé, founder of the *Caveau*, "has proved by this drama that he has neither genius, talent, or wit." Collé was wrong. All that Beaumarchais had really proved was that there was neither genius, talent, or wit in either of the dramas he had yet produced.

All this time, constant speculations, especially in the wood-cutting line, contracts, loans, love-making, and music. And in 1768 he married again, another widow, Madame Levêque, who brought him a large fortune. And here, with the wedding-bells, drops the curtain on the first act. Confess that he has done well. His name is on every lip; he is rich with his wife's income;

he is growing rich rapidly with his contracts and concessions; his irons are in a hundred fires; the watch-making past is clean gone out of sight and forgotten; he is the most envied, the most successful man of his time.

Act II.

That would be an insipid play, where all the characters were virtuous, all the incidents mere additions to existing happiness. In this act the footlights are darkened, and while the sympathetic violoncello twangs, Beaumarchais performs his great part of the good man struggling with adversity.

Old Paris-Duvernay died, leaving his money to a certain Count de la Blache, his nephew, who hated Beaumarchais with a great and solemn hatred. The partnership had already been dissolved, Duvernay giving Beaumarchais a receipt for a settlement in full of accounts, and a promissory note for 15,000 francs. La Blache, immediately on succeeding, brought an action setting aside the settlement, and claiming the sum of 139,000 francs. It does not appear that there was the least shadow of justice in the claim, which was instituted by a small-minded man to gratify personal and petty spite, and the court decided in favour of Beaumarchais. Then the count appealed, and began to stir up the waters of bitterness by means of pamphlets, which gave the affair its first importance. For the pamphleteers asserted that more than money was at stake, that the civil would be followed by a criminal action for forgery. And when, at this time, Beaumarchais lost his wife and her fortune too in child-birth, these gentlemen drew public attention to the rapid deaths of old Franquet himself, and of the two wives, more than

suggesting that Beaumarchais had poisoned all three. Everybody knows that mud will stick, whoever throws it, and Paris was quite prepared to hear, after this, what La Blache stated immediately afterwards, that Beaumarchais had been driven in disgrace from the presence of the princesses. Beaumarchais made here the one great mistake of his life, for he wrote to the Countess of Périgord asking if she would get from the princesses one single word to contradict this new calmuny. She answered that they had never said one word against his reputation. Beaumarchais immediately published a *mémoire*, in which he stated that he was "authorized" by the princesses to publish a contradiction to the statement. The princesses, angry at their names being thus brought into the affair, gave La Blache a paper, saying, that they had no interest in M. Beaumarchais' law-suit. This of course was published immediately. So that men began to look askance upon this spoiled child of fortune; there is no smoke without fire, and there might be truth in these insulting pamphlets. To make suspicions certainty there was wanting a tangible scandal. It was furnished by his own folly. Mlle. Mesnard, of the Théâtre Italien, was a young lady living under the protection of the Duc de Chaulnes, a nobleman who was remarkable for the violence of his temper and his prodigious physical strength. Beaumarchais took to paying the young lady visits, and after some time the duke perceived that her affections were transferred to the new friend. Scenes of violence, in which all but the strongest pieces of furniture were broken, followed the discovery, and the girl fled in terror to a convent. Thence, after writing to the duke that the rupture must be final, she went home and asked Beaumarchais

to visit her. He went, but first wrote a moral letter to the duke, assuring him of the virtuous sentiments under whose influence he was visiting the lady, and of the profound respect he entertained for her. It is very remarkable how all the letters written by this moralist produced an effect exactly contrary to what was intended. For they exasperated the recipient beyond endurance. There is sometimes manifested, in some of the more gifted among us, a certain ostentation of superior intellect, morals, religion or *physique*, which makes the humblest worm to wriggle in impotent wrath. And did any other man ever take away your mistress, and then tell you that his only object was to procure her happiness? The Duc de Chaulnes, speechless with wrath, went into the country and raged for two months, until he could bear himself no longer, and came up resolved to kill the man.

He went first to Mademoiselle Mesnard's. There was Gudin, friend of Beaumarchais. He took poor Gudin by the throat, tore off his wig, cuffed him, and used very terrible language. Then he broke more furniture. Then he flung out of the house, down to the court of the Warren, where Beaumarchais was hearing cases, and bursting into the place, informed the judge that he was going to drink his blood. "Have the goodness, M. le duc," said Beaumarchais, "to wait till the day's business is finished." Then he went on with his work as slowly as he could, the duke pacing backwards and forwards outside, using disquieting threats. When Beaumarchais came out, and stepped into his coach, the duke followed him, and made the drive home pleasant by rude exhortations to prepare for death. Arrived at their destination, they went upstairs together. There Beaumarchais refused to fight, and called his

servants. The duke, mad with rage, went at his enemy with his fists, tearing out his hair, kicking, scratching, and cursing. Then he drew his sword and ran a-muck among the servants, cutting off the coachman's nose, wounding the valet in the head, and the cook in the hand.

Here was a pretty scandal!—just, too, when it was all-important to have a blameless reputation. Beaumarchais was sent to the prison of For l'Évêque; the duke was sent to Vincennes; and Mlle. Mesnard ran back to her convent. "I fortify myself," she wrote, "more and more in my resolution to accept the cloister as my lot." Reading the letter over again, she added, as an afterthought, "at least for a time."

She enjoyed her seclusion for a fortnight, and then came back to the world. Beaumarchais wrote a beautiful moral letter from his prison, rebuking her for leaving hers. Alas! he could not get out, though he wrote reams of *mémoires*. They told him the best chance was to keep silence. As if Beaumarchais could ever keep silence. Why, the people might forget him. And when he did get out, he troubled himself no more about little Mesnard. It was the poor, impetuous duke who, the moment he left his prison, looked after the welfare of the girl who had deserted him.

What a curious story it is! The blameless Beaumarchais, with Gudin the good, conspiring to rob another man of his mistress; the robbed one going into a royal court declaring his intention of killing the judge, no officer of the court pushing him out; then, because he is a duke, cutting off a coachman's nose, wounding a valet and a cook, and no one making any remarks; both parties sent to prison with the impartiality of a schoolmaster who flogs all round; and, funniest thing of all, the

retreat of the young lady, about whose character there could be no manner of doubt, to a convent, where she stays as long as she pleases, and then returns to her former life. It reminds one of Boisrobert's visit to the Jesuits.

And now, when his character is at its lowest ebb, when he is in prison, when his fortune is gone, the Parliament gives their decision in the lawsuit—against him—acting on the report furnished by Councillor Goëzman. Goëzman: it is the councillor whose wife he has bribed: a hundred louis and a gold watch worth as much for herself, with fifteen louis to bribe the councillor's secretary. Madame Goëzman returns the watch and the hundred louis, and, on enquiry of the secretary, Beaumarchais ascertains that this injured official has had nothing at all. So he first appeals for a third and last trial of the case, and then brings an action against the lady for fifteen louis. She began by denying the whole story. But the thing flew about and made a scandal, for it was impossible to doubt what had happened. Goëzman got the go-between in the matter, but too late, to swear that his wife had indignantly refused all the offers of Beaumarchais, and in his turn charged him with attempted bribery and slander. He was accused, remark, by one judge, the case to be tried by the other judges and *with closed doors;* and the interest of the judges was to maintain the honour of their own body. Then Beaumarchais showed for the first time the real nature of his genius, and wrote his famous "Mémoires." We must remember that as yet he had no established position. His fortune, all locked up in works and contracts, has only a paper existence; his reputation, founded on the good opinion of the princesses, is already lost; he has failed as a dramatist; he has made innu-

merable enemies; he has no family interest. "One of the things," he says, "that I have always studied, is the command of myself in important crises." This is the most important in his life. Against him, all busily pouring out pamphlets, are arranged Goëzman, La Blache, Murin of the "Gazette de France," d'Arnaut-Baculard the novelist, Bertrand the banker; all the judges of the new parliament; and all Paris, prejudiced by the late scandals. With him, Gudin the faithful, to find the Latin; Falconnet, an *avocat*, to find the law; brothers-in-law, Morin and Lépine; and above all, Julie the witty, Julie the satirical, Julie who could stab with a sarcasm and kill with a *mot*. To these faithful friends the hero brings his "Mémoires" in the rough; by them they are forged and hammered and cut into shape, till they are as deadly as so many torpedoes; and then they are launched at the enemy. Remember that these "Mémoires," on which Beaumarchais must chiefly rest his claims, form a sort of literature of their own. Nothing like them before or since. Clear and incisive, witty, ironical, satirical, and straight to the point. During the whole case they continue, always keeping before the people the names of Goëzman and La Blache, but careful to throw into their pages all sorts of other things. Thus, there are passages on public and private rights, arguments on law, views of history, even a dissertation on baptism. All this fuss about fifteen louis! And then Beaumarchais, rising to a dazzling moral height, lays his hand upon his heart and says: "I am a citizen. I am neither an abbé, nor a courtier, nor a gentleman,[1] nor a favourite, nor anything as we call power now-a-

[1] In another place he says that he is a gentleman by indisputable right, *for he has kept the receipt.*

days. I am a citizen: that is something new, unheard-of in France. I am a citizen, which you should have been two hundred years ago, which you shall be, perhaps, in twenty years." So posing for a moment in seriousness, he breaks off into a laugh, and carries on the gaiety. The applause is deafening. Citizen Beaumarchais! The title which he assumed with so grand a flourish, was destined to live, and in less than twenty years all would indeed be citizens. Paris screamed with delight at the "Mémoires." All Europe read them. In his quiet retreat at Ferney, Voltaire grew jealous of their reputation. "They exhibit *esprit*," he said, "but I think that more was required to write 'Zaïre.'"

All this fracas about fifteen louis, while it delighted the Parisians, drove the Goëzman party mad, and made the author popular, was the most delightful time probably that Beaumarchais ever had. "La variété," he says, "des peines et des plaisirs, des craintes et des espérances, est le vent frais qui met le navire en branle et le fait avancer gaiement dans sa route."

The excitement grew daily greater. Beaumarchais had played a dangerous game indeed. He had made the new formed parliament ridiculous, and the new formed parliament was to try his case: only public opinion was on his side. It came on at last, and after an angry discussion of three hours, during which the people waited outside, they gave their judgment. It was a compromise. Madame Goëzman was condemned to the penalty of "blame," and ordered to give back the fifteen louis.

Her husband was placed out of court,[1] a sentence

[1] Goëzman retired into the country, and lived for twenty years in quiet and obscurity, angry with the world and himself. Then the friends of Robespierre discovered that he was an "enemy of

which obliged him to resign. Beaumarchais was also judged to have incurred the penalty of "blame."

This penalty was no light matter. It rendered the condemned incapable of holding any public post, and he had to receive the sentence on his knees. "The court blames thee, and renders thee infamous."

The hero of the Mémoires always declared afterwards that he intended to kill himself had the court condemned him to the pillory. He did not know his own mind so well as we know it. He would have stood in the pillory, his friends, now all Paris, standing bareheaded at his feet. The pillory? It would have been the most glorious, the most intoxicating moment of his life. Not a single dead cat, not one rotten egg would have been thrown. Nothing but the sighs of women, the shouts of patriots, and the richest flowers, would have been discharged at that noble martyr. To be sure he *had* tried to bribe a judge, but what was that? had he not made all Paris laugh for a twelvemonth? had he not made the new parliament contemptible? had he not been the occasion of a thousand epigrams, *bons-mots* and good stories? I have always been exceedingly sorry, in my zeal for my hero's reputation, that he was not put in the pillory.

As it was, he was "infamous." But all Paris called upon the infamous man: the Prince de Conti and the Duke de Chartres gave him a grand fête the day after the judgment. Said policeman Sartines, reprovingly, "It is not enough for you to be infamous, you must also be modest," as if Beaumarchais *could* be modest; as if the leopard could change its spots.

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the people," and cut off the poor old man's head. He might have met some of the Beaumarchais family in prison at the same time.

But two or three things have still to be effected. He must get restitution of civil rights, he must get the La Blache suit decided in his favour, and he must make some more money. Court influence is necessary for all three. So Beaumarchais changes his dress and appears before us in his new and surprising character of *Mouchard*. Yes, the great man becomes a spy and secret agent.

There was a certain scoundrel in London, of the threatening-letter tribe, who was scaring Madame du Barry out of her wits. The early days of Du Barry were, as every one knows, remarkable for a certain frolicsome gaiety, unrestrained by the prudish sobriety which marks the conduct of some young ladies. M. Thévenau de Morande had possessed himself of all the facts connected with her life, and now proposed to publish them for the admiration of the world, unless . . . the usual conclusion. Louis sent over certain police agents, who were instructed to seize him secretly and bring him across the Channel. De Morande got a hint of what was intended, saw them land at London Bridge, and pointed them out to the boatmen as French spies and informers, whereupon they were all thrown into the river. Those who were not drowned went home again at once, recommending another and a safer method. Beaumarchais had an invitation to try what could be done. Disguising himself carefully (there was not the least reason for any disguise), he went over and bought up the book, seeing all the sheets carefully burned, at the scoundrel's own price, £800 down, and a pension of £160 a year. Then he hurried back triumphant. "Had your Majesty confided the conduct of this case to any ordinary practitioner, Heaven knows what the consequences might have been." Louis promised the restitution of the civil rights, and

but for that fatal smallpox, which gave France a sixteenth Louis, all would have been well.

But there was another—a libeller, this time, on Marie-Antoinette. More disguise, more buying-up and burning of sheets. Only this time the libeller, a man of small moral principle, concealed one copy. Beaumarchais chased him all across Europe, caught him up at Nuremberg, tore the copy from him, and then dashed down the Danube, presenting himself before the Empress of Vienna, breathless, gesticulating rapidly, calling on heaven and earth to witness his zeal. "All this about a twopenny libel?" asked the Empress. "Go, my poor man; you must be mad: get yourself bled." So they locked him up for a month, taking away all dangerous instruments, and insisting on strong medicines, with blood-letting. When they let him out he returned to Paris, trying to look as if he had not made an ass of himself, and consoling himself by sending in his little bill of £2,880 for posting expenses.

One more trial of his loyalty. This was the case of the Chevalier d'Eu, who, everybody knows now, was not a woman at all. Why Beaumarchais was sent to him, what all the fuss was about, why the chevalier should have mystified everybody (he pretended to fall in love with Beaumarchais, who was hugely pleased and pretended to be embarrassed with his conquest); why he deserved a pension; why the king insisted on his returning to Paris—all these are questions perfectly impossible to answer. Beaumarchais succeeded—that is, he persuaded a poor man to receive an annual income for doing nothing—and then came back to proclaim his admirable talents as a negotiator. These three Herculean labours accomplished, Fortune smiles once more. He obtains a reversal of his sentence as

"infâme," is restored to civil rights, and can give up the spy business, which, to tell the truth, he never really liked.

And now the curtain falls on the tableau of a repentant France giving back his honour to a deeply wronged and eminently virtuous man.

Act III.

Beaumarchais is once more a contractor and a financier. He is more. He is now a successful dramatist, for to this period of his life belong the two plays by which he remains known, the "Barber of Seville" and the "Marriage of Figaro." Of these, his two masterpieces, it might be said fairly enough that they are exactly like those old plays of impossible intrigue which Alexandre Hardy, predecessor of Molière, poured out by the hundred. They are, from a literary point of view, thin; there is hardly a line which deserves to be remembered; and they are stagey, conventional, and unnatural. So much conceded, it remains to be said that his gaiety, his profusion of animal spirits, his prodigality of wit, his adaptation of the old conventional comedy to the manners, follies, and ideas of the day carry away the reader as well as the spectator.

How Paris crowded to see his plays, how the very class most satirized, laughed and applauded, how the spirit of the day was exactly caught—all this everybody knows. Let us go on to what is more interesting, the life of the illustrious author. Of course, he must have a quarrel, because this inimitable man never had the smallest dealings with his fellow-creatures without one. This time, he did good service. There was an abominable law at the Théâtre Français, that when the receipts fell below a certain sum, the piece became the absolute

property of the actors. This was very hard upon authors, who generally saw themselves, after a few nights' representations, plundered of all future profit. Beaumarchais was the first to make a stand for the dramatists against the actors, and established in its earliest form a dramatic authors' society, to vindicate their own rights and secure themselves something from the rapacity of the actors. Let him have full credit for this. It was a great and substantial achievement for literature, whose followers have had to fight a desperate battle to gain even an approximately fair share of what their labours produce.

All this by way of amusement, for the real business of his life was now to make money. He saw, early in the struggle between America and England, that the States must ultimately win their independence. He went over to England, satisfied himself that the British government were themselves beginning to despair, and then returning to Paris, wrote to M. de Vergennes urging that France should send arms, munitions, even troops to America. De Vergennes asked him for a plan which might avoid any rupture with Great Britain. He submitted one which was characteristic, if not entirely disinterested. "Give *me*," he said, "three million francs, and I will assist the Americans myself." After endless negotiation and trouble, he actually got one million francs from the French government, *lent* in this secret way to the United States, and one million from Spain. For both these sums his written receipts are extant.

Things getting gradually in trim, the firm of "Rodrigue Hertalez and Company"—he might just as well have written his own name on every packet sent—undertook to supply the States with 200 cannons, 25,000 guns, 200,000 pounds of powder, clothing and

tents for 25,000 men, with shot, shell, and other munitions of war, all which things were to be subtracted without fuss from the French arsenals. Ships were purchased, the cargoes were put on board, certain artillery and engineer officers were engaged to accompany the expedition, and after endless delays, owing to the interference of the English, and the pretended anxiety of the French government to preserve neutrality, three ships got off, and, eluding the English cruisers, put into the American port of Portsmouth in the beginning of 1777. Two more ships followed, laden with a similar cargo. Then Beaumarchais, saying nothing about the 2,000,000 francs, and the fact that his stores were all taken from the French arsenals, sent in his bill. The Americans replied, that though they appreciated the services of M. de Beaumarchais, they understood the cargoes to be a secret present from the French government. Beaumarchais, without giving up his claim, went to M. de Vergennes and got from him another million francs, so that he had now actually obtained for his five ships, the sum of £120,000, with, so far as can be understood, the cargoes themselves. The ships being now his own property, it was not a bad beginning.

In any case, the credit of Messrs. Rodrigue Hertalez and Company stood high. The company in a short time became owners of a fleet of twenty ships, armed and mounted like vessels of war. They were chiefly engaged in conveying to America cargoes of a peaceful character, consisting of European goods, "for," writes the great man at this time, "commerce before war." Then war was declared between England and France. The splendid ship "Le Fier Rodrigue," the finest of Beaumarchais' fleet, was forced to join in an action off Granada, and came out of it glorious indeed, but

riddled with balls, while the ten ships which she had been sent to protect, were all dispersed and mostly picked up by the English cruisers. For this loss and the services of the "Rodrigue," Beaumarchais received an indemnity of 2,000,000 francs. In 1778, when the alliance of France and America was formed, he received drafts from Congress to the amount of 2,544,000 francs, and in the following year he sent in his bill for the remaining amount, a trifle of 3,000,000 francs. Then came letters, explanations, examination of accounts. In 1781, the business was put in the hands of Mr. Arthur Lee, who had already quarrelled with Beaumarchais. He showed his fairness towards his old adversary, by making him the *debtor* to the States of 1,800,000 francs. More protestations. In 1793, Mr. Alexander Hamilton examined the bills again, and found that the States, on the other hand, owed Beaumarchais 2,280,000 francs. Year after year he presented his account and claimed payment. When an exile from France, living in a garret at Hamburg, proscribed and in hiding, he writes still, but now in the lofty tone of an injured patriot. "Am I to stand before you, holding out the cap of liberty which no man has helped you to win so much as myself? Am I to say, 'Americans, a little alms for your friend, whose services have received but this reward—Date obolum Belisario?'" "Belisarius," said the Americans, "is a humbug. He has made a fortune out of us, and we owe him nothing."

A fortune he certainly had made, and he was spending it royally. His new house, as stately as that of Kubla Khan, stood opposite to the Bastille, in its beautiful gardens, one of the sights of Paris, and the owner was to be seen in his carriage every day, a standing example of the force of genius, ability, and impudence.

The "Mariage de Figaro," acted in spite of all opposition, was the crowning-point of his dramatic career. It was successful because Beaumarchais was, above all, able to catch the spirit of the day and transfer it to his canvas. On the stage before them Paris saw herself, with her cynicism, her flippancy, her uncertainty. What she did not see was what the writer could not see—underlying all these surface mockeries, the deeper yearning after a better life, after justice, fraternity, the abolition of unrealities, which made the Revolution noble.

The "Mariage" was played for sixty-eight nights. On the fiftieth the author announced that the profits were to be devoted to the poor. Does any one dare to say that Beaumarchais is greedy and selfish? Behold his answer—a new Society for the Benefit of Nursing Mothers. Great and good man! Others may do their charity in a sneaking, secret, and underhand manner. He will let all the world look on while he helps on our fatal modern method of pauperizing the people by taking away the necessity for thrift:—

> De Beaumarchais admire la souplesse:
> En bien, en mal, son triomphe est complet:
> A l'enfance il donne du lait
> Et du poison à la jeunesse.

More glory. He wrote, of the difficulties of getting the play acted, that he had had to contend with "lions and tigers." Louis thought he was personally insulted. Should a Caron de Beaumarchais call his king a lion and a tiger? With his own royal hand, in fact, on the seven of spades, the king himself wrote an order for his arrest, and, to make the thing more marked, sent him, not to the Bastille, where a gentleman was made to feel at home, but to St.-Lazare, among the common rogues. Paris

laughed at the poet's discomfiture, and then began to rage and fume, because nobody was safe if this sort of thing went on. They let him out in five days, rather ashamed of themselves. Beaumarchais at first refused to go out, for he was writing a splendid new *mémoire*, but thought better of it.

A quarrel with Mirabeau; another law-suit about a woman; the case decided in his favour; more letter-writing with America; fresh claims on the government, giving him an additional two millions; his unsuccessful opera of "Tarare;" these are the events which bring him down to the crash of the Great Revolution.

He began his share of it characteristically, by getting a contract, for he is now the most patriotic of citizens and the most disinterested. He will procure 60,000 guns for the new republic. These guns, though they cost him endless troubles and anxieties, saved his life by taking him out of France during the Reign of Terror. He is prosecuted as an *émigré*, he, the patriot, actually at Hamburg about the gun business; his wife and daughter are in prison; the beautiful house is searched and visited every day; his very name is gone, and he is once more plain Caron; his property is confiscated; "the cherries in the garden all seized for the people," writes poor Julie, all alone by herself, and nearly starving, in the great Beaumarchais palace, "not even the stones left." For four years he writes and appeals—Santerre himself always said he was an honest fellow—but does not dare to return. And it was not till 1796 that he came back, to find his house defaced, his furniture gone, his fortune broken up, his papers seized.

He spent three years more, the last three years of his life, in fighting over his money and his claims. The *reality* of events was too much for him, who had been

accustomed to regard everything as unreal; the enthusiasm of the new men was more than he could understand; the way in which noble sentiments were bowled over, and really beautiful periods disregarded, offended and annoyed him; while there seemed no opening at all in this new republic for a good old shoddy contract. Besides all this, he had grown deaf. Poor Julie was dead—she died with an impromptu, a very improper one, on her frivolous, faithful, loving lips. Then Beaumarchais saw his daughter safely married, and died quietly in his bed on the 27th of May, 1799, aged 67 years.

Surely no man ever lived so busy a life, no man ever united in himself so many contradictory characteristics. He is greedy, grasping, unscrupulous. He has no morals and no religion, in spite of what his biographers say. He bribes judges, seduces actresses, corrupts counsel, never has a pecuniary transaction without a quarrel, and never makes a friend who appears to have been worth having. On the other hand, he is generous to all sorts of poor creatures who hang round him and depend upon him. He is bright, facile, high-spirited, lively, and clever. He is charming in society, but he never quite catches the tone of the best society. He is adored by his own family circle; he is detested by men who seem to have had no reason whatever for the liveliness of their hatred.

In his active life he accomplished a dozen things, any one of which was enough to make a reputation. He improved the mechanism of watches; he perfected the harp; he started a Dramatic Authors' Society; he provided Paris with water; he invented the word "citizen;" he dared to stand up, alone and unaided, and fight the parliament; and he was the first in France to see the certain outcome of the American struggle.

An actor! the cleverest and most versatile actor of the day: his life not, as he proudly called it, a battle, but a drama, in which he unfolds his character step by step. But always he must be before the public, always on the stage.

And see how the drama would act. Look at the splendid situations of the last act alone. The Bastille falling before your eyes; Beaumarchais as Lucius Junius Brutus; Beaumarchais distributing money to the poor; Beaumarchais in secret service for the republic; Beaumarchais in exile, poor and deserted, smiting his breast, —so stood Belisarius before he had to ask for that paltry obolus.

And then, just as the position of things threatens to become tedious, a swift and sudden death brings down the curtain, and the drama is finished. It has been full of surprising situations; there have been rounds of applause; repeatedly the principal actor has been called before the curtain; and, finally, there has not been a dull line in it from beginning to end.

Chapter XIX.

BÉRANGER.

Le bon Dieu me dit, chante,
Chante, pauvre petit.

FROM a moral point of view, the troop of humourists which has passed in review before us is a ragged regiment indeed. Falstaff's own was not more out at elbows. Their duds of morality fluttering in the breeze may lend a touch of the picturesque, but it is sad to confess that there is hardly one—Boileau the respectable always excepted—in whom the moralist can take a reasonable pride. For the men whose writings have been the household words of France, were, one and all, lamentably deficient in those elementary virtues on which the social life is based. I am therefore glad to be able to finish this volume with one of whose character nothing but praise is to be said, or if any dispraise, then with such overwhelming balance of laudation as to annihilate its effect. For Béranger's practice was better than his preaching, while, save for a few weaknesses of humanity, he was entirely a good man. *Vir bonus est quis?*—He is one who practises self-denial, is open to charity, sympathy, and all noble influences,

is debased by no unworthy vices, is no greedy miser, no backbiter, no hypocrite; one who rejoices in the love and esteem of his friends, and has a healthy pride in himself. And such was Béranger.

He is indeed a man whose life, as well as his songs, may well bring the tears into our eyes. There has been no lyrist like him in any language; none with a voice and heart so intensely human, so sympathetic, so strong to move, so quick to feel. And yet, nurtured in the traditions of the eighteenth century, when everything was sentimental and unreal, he never appreciated the enormous difference between himself and those who sang of Lindor and Camille. Does it not seem, somehow, that the highest genius is least able to understand its own power? It is only the second-rate writer who inflates himself with pride in thinking that he too has caught something of the sacred fire. Shakespeare must have been a modest man. And Béranger is, in some way, the Shakespeare of France. At least, to be more modest in assertion, he is one of the three or four Frenchmen who stand in the front, men to whom has been given the glorious gift of speaking what others can only feel. To utter the wants and sufferings of others; to lose your own individuality in the hopes and loves of the world—it is to be to mankind what the wife may be to the husband. The world has but few of these sacred brides, these wedded souls. Humanity, whom, by some curious error—it was in the days when men mistrusted Nature, and were afraid—we have figured as a woman seeking a bridegroom for a protector, takes this devotion as a right, and only repays it by an undying love. Such love as we feel to Shakespeare, with no critical measurements of how much less is due, I claim for Rabelais, for Molière, and for Béranger.

His life was spent in self-sought obscurity. Had it not been for his imprisonments, for his autobiography, and a few remaining letters, we should know no more about him than that he lived and wrote, while future ages, arguing from the differences between his poems, might have denied his individuality altogether. "Could the same man have written the 'Roi d'Yvetot' and the 'Étoiles qui filent'? Could a poet of youth and joy—things essentially selfish—have been at the same time so sympathetic and so sad?" For the weakest point of critics is their inability to understand how a man can be many-sided; given one pose, one mood, one success, they expect the immobility of a statue; and the soul of man, *animula vagula*, as full of change as the ocean, is to be fixed in a numberless smile, or an eternal sorrow. Now the perfect *chansonnier*, of whom Béranger is the one great and unique type, has as many moods as humanity itself.

I have tried to show how far those French writers who come within my range succeeded, and how far they failed. Both their failure and their success I have connected with the conditions of their lives. But Béranger wholly succeeded, for every single circumstance of his life and station played, in the happiest way, into his hands. He was a member of the lower middle class, not too far above the *ouvrier* rank, not too far below the *bourgeois*, to represent the feelings and thoughts of both. There was no aspiration of both classes that he could not share, no prejudice that he could not understand. You have seen, perhaps, that social pyramid on which the statistician has represented the successive stages of wealth, and therefore, as the world goes, culture. As we ascend the strata, individuality be-

comes possible. The inarticulate mass at the bottom can think of nothing but their common wants and dangers. As we ascend, as life grows more and more beyond the reach of anxiety, the way is opened for those to speak who are endowed with the power of thought and speech.

Béranger, born 1780, was the son of a grocer's apprentice and a milliner. His father, who claimed the right to put a *de* before his name, and could produce a twopenny genealogy, deserted his mother at his birth.[1] Then grandfather Champy took in the boy, and the mother went her own way. Both parents—in his autobiography Béranger strives to hide a bitter sense of their worthlessness—seem to have been as bad as was possible. But his guardians more than replaced the neglect of his parents. He tells us how old Champy would read aloud the popular work of the Abbé Raynal, "L'Histoire des deux Indes," while his grandmother, for her part, pored over the romances of Prévôt and the works of Voltaire,[2] and both united in spoiling their grandchild. The boy was not too fond of going to school, and at every opportunity made excuses for staying away, his great delight being to sit in a corner and carve little baskets out of cherry-stones. At nine years of age, having already read the "Henriade" and a translation of the "Jerusalem Delivered," he was

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[1] Eh quoi! j'apprends que l'on critique
Le *de* qui précède mon nom.
Êtes-vous de noblesse antique?
Moi noble? oh! vraiment, messieurs, non!
Non, d'aucune chevalerie
Je n'ai le brevet sur velin:
Je ne sais qu'aimer ma patrie.
Je suis vilain et très-vilain.

[2] "Elle cotait sans cesse M. de Voltaire, ce qui ne l'empêchait pas, à la Fête-Dieu, de me faire passer sous le saint sacrement."

sent to school in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, whence he was an eye-witness to the taking of the Bastille:—

> J'étais bien jeune: on criait, Vengeons-nous!
> A la Bastille! aux armes! vite, aux armes!
> Marchands, bourgeois, artisans, couraient tous.

The only prize the boy got was that which every one was anxious to avoid—the cross for good conduct, and even then the bad boy of the school, one Grammont, who was afterwards very properly guillotined, an example to all bad boys, forced him to steal an apple, and then accused him of the theft, grinning at the taking-away of the cross. However, the cross was restored and the accuser discredited. Presently the grandfather had a paralytic stroke; his father, now a notary at Derval, would not pay for his education, and his mother cared nothing about him. So they took him from school and sent him down to Péronne, where an aunt had an *auberge*. It helps to show how little Béranger ever read or thought about history, that he thinks it quite unnecessary to say a word about the historical interest of the place where Louis XI. was a prisoner, where the Treaty of Péronne, "la Pucelle," was signed, and where later on Wellington made one of his minor conquests. His aunt, declaring at first that she could not support this additional burden, lost her courage when she looked at his curly hair and pretty face, and burst into tears, crying, "Pauvre abandonné, je te servirai de mère." His mother, as we hear, was living by herself, going to theatres, balls, and concerts. The excellent aunt was a woman of active mind as well as a good *aubergiste*. Her library consisted of Télémaque, Racine, and Voltaire's plays, so that here was no small addition to the boy's reading. As yet, however, he only knew how to read to himself, could not pronounce the words, could

not write or spell. The village schoolmaster taught him these useful arts, with a little simple ciphering, and there his formal education ended. He was made to go to church so long as the churches were open, and even served as an assistant to the priest, who tried to teach him the Latin prayers, but the boy was so awkward and clumsy at the altar, that the priest one day swore at him aloud during the service, and declared that he should no longer be permitted to assist. Little Béranger was only too glad to escape.[1]

Then came the wars, and the boy could sit at the door of the little inn and hear the cannons booming at the siege of Valenciennes, filling his soul with nameless terrors. Judge then of his joy when defeats became victories, when the tide of battle rolled far off, and the cannons were only fired to proclaim the successes of the republic. Thus he drank in the sentiment of patriotism with the fresh country-air that was making him strong and healthy. A thunderstorm, in which the lightning struck him, affected for a time his eyesight, so that he could not be apprenticed to the watchmaking trade, for which his dexterity of finger seemed peculiarly to adapt him. Then he became a clerk to M. Ballue de Bellenglise, magistrate, disciple of Rousseau, and founder of the Péronne Club, in which the boys of the town held discussions, formed themselves into a corps, drilled, and sang republican songs. But clerk's work was not in Béranger's line—perhaps he did not write well enough—and the good magistrate placed him as an apprentice to a printer, where he spent two years, and acquired something of the art of orthography.

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[1] "Je vois bien," said his aunt, "que tu ne seras jamais dévot."

The printer took an interest in him and tried to teach him, but without success, the rules of syntax and prosody; for Béranger had no other teacher but his own ear and the verses of La Fontaine.

In 1795 his father, now a red-hot royalist, sent for him to Paris. He had patched up a kind of peace with his wife, and was full of financial schemes, in which his son was to aid him. Young Béranger suddenly developed a great turn for calculation, and as his father's business lay entirely in the buying and selling of *assignats*, that is, in money-lending, he was employed all day in making out estimates and accounts. At the same time the father was occupied in petty royalist plots, hiding conspirators, and trying to make himself of importance, so that when the white cockade should return, he might arm himself with his genealogy, and claim the right of the *grande entrée;* for he nursed the wildest dreams of the future; saw himself in imagination the first banker in Paris, his son a page to Louis XVIII., and his future a splendour like that of Beaumarchais.[1]

In 1798 came the crash. Down went the banking-house, over went the basket of eggs, the genealogy was finally put away into a drawer, the future poet was relieved of all fear of becoming page to the king, and the father's dreams of greatness ended in a second-hand book-shop, one of those miserable shops where the worst kind of French romances were exhibited and sold. It was in the Rue Saint-Nicaise. One evening Béranger was returning to the shop when he was startled by an explosion close by—the earth trembled beneath him,

[1] It is at this point of his tale that Béranger stops to tell the true and touching story of "La Mère Jary." Nothing in fiction, except the sorrows of the old recluse in "Notre Dame de Paris," can equal this humble tragedy.

the windows crashed, the houses shook. It was that infernal machine which was to have destroyed the first consul. One step more, and there would have been no poetry of Béranger; one step less, and there would have been no emperor for him to lament. How did he live at this time? Probably on some share of the book-shop, about which he maintains silence. "I lived in a garret in the sixth story, Boulevard Saint-Martin. . . I installed myself in my den with an inexplicable satisfaction, without money, without any certainty as to the future, but happy at least in being freed from so many *mauvaises affaires*, which since my return to Paris had never ceased to wound my sentiments and my tastes. To live alone, to live entirely at my ease, seemed perfect happiness:"

With pensive eyes the little room I view
Where in my youth I weathered it so long;
With a wild mistress, a staunch friend or two,
And a light heart still breaking into song.
Making a mock of life, and all its cares,
Rich in the glory of my rising sun,
Lightly I vaulted up four pair of stairs,
In the brave days when I was twenty-one.[1]

It was at this time that he formed friendships which lasted till death, with Autier, the vaudevilliste, Lebrun, afterwards Academician, and Wilhelm Bocquillon, musician. In their garrets these young fellows wrote songs and music, promising each other future success, happy in the little fêtes that their slender purses allowed, and making every stroke of poverty the peg for new laughter. Thus, when Béranger gets a ticket to see the solemn Te Deum chanted at Notre Dame, when all the kings were present, he sings:—

[1] Le Grenier. Thackeray's translation.

Next Sunday, five kings in a row
On our fortunate vision will flash;
I am sure they would like me to go,
So I've sent off my shirt to the wash.
I've a hat; I've a very good coat;
Of stockings a sensible pair;
And everything else I have got,
If only I'd breeches to wear.

In 1804, being then twenty-four years of age, and tired of starving in that happy garret of his, he wrote to Lucien Bonaparte, enclosing a bundle of verses. Two days passed without an answer. Judith Frère with a pack of cards prophesied that a letter would arrive which would please him. Incredulous Béranger! he did not believe the revelations of the cards, and next day found him hopeless of an answer, patching up his boots and his trousers, and meditating misanthropic rhymes. Suddenly he hears footsteps. It is the concierge, who brings him a letter in an unknown hand. "I open it with a trembling hand; the senator, Lucien Bonaparte has read my verses, and wishes to see me! It was not fortune that I saw before me, it was glory." He borrowed respectable clothes, and went. Lucien received him kindly, read him good advice, and as he had just been made a member of the Institute, gave him the little pension allotted to the post. It was a thousand francs, forty pounds a year; a little fortune to the poor young poet. Above all, it was the kindly act, the encouraging word, that he wanted. And it must be recorded, that Béranger never forgot the gracious act of this best of all the Bonapartes.

He next obtained a post which brought him in about seventy pounds a year, in the bureaux of the painter Landon, for whom he edited his "Musée." A hundred and ten pounds a year!—it was wealth—affluence; it enabled him to gratify the greatest pleasure of his life, the

helping of others. It gave him the power of keeping his grandmother, the poor old woman, ruined by the *assignats*, and his sister, a workgirl, whom he subsequently put into a convent at her own wish.

At this time, under the influence of Chateaubriand, he made a grand effort to become orthodox in his faith. It was useless, orthodoxy being a fold out of which, once a sheep has strayed, it can never again enter. Béranger renounced the attempt, and remained to the end, not an infidel, but one who had no belief; no virulent enemy of the faith, but one who found himself outside and was content to remain there. English critics always want to know exactly what creed a writer held. And it is important within certain limits. More deductions, for instance, would have to be made in the statements and opinions of a ritualist than in those of a stronger brother. But it seems to me impertinent to push the question too far, and I admire that custom of the Americans in never troubling themselves about any man's religion. Was Béranger a Christian? I do not know. Was he a Protestant, a Romanist? Certainly not; he followed the sect of Béranger:—

> . . . . Dieu n'est point colère:
> S'il créa tout, à tout il sert d'appui.

After working for three years for M. Landon, his task was accomplished, his income reduced, and only Lucien's thousand francs remained. One of his Péronne friends, Quênescourt by name, lent him what little money he wanted to tide him over the unproductive time, and invited him to stay at Péronne, where his old friends made a grand reception for him. He wrote songs for them; singing them himself at their feasts, with that sweet voice of his, like Tom Moore's, facile but not too strong, and helped out by the singer's feeling.

On the foundation of the Imperial University in 1808, he obtained employment as one of the clerks, with a salary of a thousand francs. It was little, but it was something. He had now, therefore, eighty pounds a year, and regretted the death of his scamp of a father, which happened "just when I could have made his days more comfortable." He went on with his grand literary projects, at the same time writing songs, to which he turned as a sort of recreation, not understanding as yet that here was the real work of his life.

Several of these, including the "Sénateur," the "Petit Homme Gris," "Les Gueux," and the "Roi d'Yvetot," were handed about in manuscript, the last-named attracting the attention of the police. Béranger, though his hand grew firmer, and his purpose steadier with years, hardly ever surpassed these his earliest efforts.

Absurd as it seems to speak of poems so well known as these, was there ever so good and easy a thing as that of the Roi d'Yvetot?—

On conserve le portrait
De ce digne et bon prince:
C'est l'enseigne d'un cabaret
Fameux dans la province.

Remember, too, when you sing "Roger Bontemps" that he is the lineal descendant of the Bontemps of Roger de Collerye:—

Aux gens atrabilaires
Pour exemple donné
En un temps de misères
Roger Bontemps est né.[1]

[1] Vive le roy . . . Vive le roy . . .
Et tous compaignons et moy!
Je suis Bontemps, qui d'Angleterre
Suis ici venu de grant erre
En ce pays d'Auxerrois.
ROGER DE COLLERYE (*fifteenth century*).

And you must own at least, that no song exists in any language, or can exist, lighter, brighter, merrier, than that of the careless toper in grey:—

Quand la goutte l'accable
Sur un lit délabré,
Le curé
De la mort et du diable
Parle à ce moribond,
Qui répond,
Ma foi, moi, je m'en . . .
Ma foi, moi, je m'en . . .
Ma foi, moi, je m'en ris.
Oh! qu'il est gai, qu'il est gai, le petit homme gris!

The police wanted Napoleon to suppress the "Roi d'Yvetot." Napoleon had no literary tastes like his brother, nor could he understand literature, but at least he could see that if no more violent attack was made upon his throne than this picture of the *bonhomme* king, he might sit secure.

So Béranger became known. They invited him to the New Caveau, a club of poets and *littérateurs* established in imitation of that of Piron, Panard, and Collé. Desaugiers was president. Béranger had a capital dinner one night with them, and, fired by the generous wine, sang all his best songs. They elected him a member there and then. It was a fit and proper commencement of his fame. The clinking of the glasses, the shouts of the guests, the laughter and mirth of the evening, reminded the *chansonnier* of his real function in life—to delight his hearers.

The songs written by Desaugiers and his predecessors were of two classes: songs bacchanalian and songs amatory. As yet, save in a few scattered specimens, the element of pathos was not in the modern chanson; and no one had discovered, what was left to Béranger

to do, the lyric capabilities of the common people. France, from the days of Olivier Basselin downwards, has always been rich in drinking songs, and Desaugiers himself was the lineal descendant of Olivier, as gay, as careless, as sparkling.

Quand je vois des gens ici-bas
Sécher de chagrin ou d'envie,
Ces malheureux, dis-je tout bas,
N'ont donc jamais bu de leur vie !
On ne m'entendra pas crier
Peine, famine, ni misère,
Tant que j'aurai de quoi payer
Le vin que peut tenir mon verre.

Béranger has never, so far as I remember, written a drinking-song pure and simple. That is, there is always something besides the wine:—

L'Amour, l'Amitié, le vin
Veut égayer le festin.
* * *
Bon vin et fillette.

Or it is Madame Grégoire—

Qui attirait des gens
Par des airs engageants.
* * *
Ah ! comme on entrait
Boire dans son cabaret.

Always a girl, or a friend, or a group, without whom the wine loses its taste and drinking has no attractions. At the New Caveau, however, at which Béranger was not a very frequent guest, drinking was the principal theme of song, and Desaugiers the principal singer.

If Béranger read the love songs of his time, he might choose between the dainty pastorals of Florian, the pretty trifling of Gentil Bernard, or the coarse rollicking of Gombaut, Piron, Collé, and the rest of the eighteenth century song-writers. Thus Florian, rest-

ing sweetly on a bank, with ribbons round his arm and flowers round his hat, just like Sancho Panza in his projected Arcadia, sings plaintively:—

Love's sweetness but a moment stays,
Love's promise all a life beguiles;
For Sylvia's sake I waste my days,
Yet Sylvia for another smiles.
Love's sweetness but a moment stays,
Love's promise all a life beguiles.

"While yonder streamlet," Sylvia says,
"Winds gleaming under greenwood aisles,
My love shall last." The stream still strays,
But Sylvia for another smiles,
Love's sweetness but a moment stays,
Love's promise all a life beguiles.

While the authors of the "Gaudrioles" bang the table and bellow the chorus of the following, the "Maiden's Confession," sung by a member of the first Caveau, it is due to these gentlemen's reputation to state, that this is the most innocent and insipid song in the whole of their valuable collection:—

At confession I whispered my sins
In the ear of the Priest of Pompone:
"My sweetheart each morning begins
With a kiss—but the fault is my own.
La—ri—ra,
Your Reverence of Pompone.

"With a kiss every morning begins;
It is wrong, but the fault is my own."
"My daughter, for this class of sins
Only pilgrimage long may atone."
La—ri—ra,
Your Reverence of Pompone.

"For kisses and such pleasant sins,
On pilgrimage you must begone."
"Yes, father, and when it begins,
He shall come with me, all alone."
La—ri—ra,
Your Reverence of Pompone.

"My Robin, too, when it begins,
Shall go with me, all to atone."
"My child, I perceive, in your sins,
Unregenerate pleasure you own."
La—ri—ra,
Your Reverence of Pompone.

"'Tis with sorrow I see, in your sins
This pleasure so worldly you own;
But since penance forgiveness wins,
Kiss me twice, my dear child, and be gone."
La—ri—ra,
Your Reverence of Pompone.

The pre-Béranger songs are thus satirical, bacchanalian, witty, patriotic, and erotic. They have every quality that we find in Béranger except one. They are hard, they are selfish, they have no sympathy. They are written, as it were, each for itself, as if their writer could feel no sorrows but his own, and no pleasures but his own. Let us, with this digression, return to the life of Béranger.

It is in 1813; Béranger is thirty-three years of age when these songs appear. You remember how La Fontaine and Molière were already well past the *première jeunesse* when their best works appeared. For the best French fruit takes time to ripen. Béranger was a slow and careful writer. At the outside, about ten songs in a year; hardly one a month; painfully corrected, recorrected, altered, improved. Some two hundred and fifty songs altogether.

In 1814, Béranger was witness of the return of the Bourbons. He describes the scene: the people, never dreaming of a capitulation, asked each other, "Where is he?" for, says Béranger, "la patrie" meant Napoleon. He came not. Then the news flew about the city had capitulated; one or two voices in the crowd cried "Vivent les Bourbons," one or two

white cockades timidly appeared; and when the Russians and Germans entered, some few hundreds tried to manifest the enthusiasm of a city, and multiplied themselves in shouting, handkerchief-waving, and even kissing the dusty boots of their saviours. The king entered Paris, infirm, old before his time; after him followed a small band of Napoleon's soldiers, scarred and bronzed, whom they had persuaded to join in the demonstration. "Vive la garde impériale!" cried the crowd. No shouts for Louis le Désiré. And with him came back the daughter of Louis XVI., the Duchess of Angoulême. Cold, harsh, haughty, as if she could never forgive the miseries of her youth, she lost at once the affection and sympathy which had followed her through all her years of absence. If the advisers of kings would only teach them how easy it is to be popular!

In 1815, appeared Béranger's first collection. The author of the "Roi d'Yvetot" which Napoleon's police wanted to suppress, was positively, then, not a Bourbonist. In the suspicious and intolerant atmosphere of the new government, not to be a partisan was to be an enemy. He was *averti*, which meant at least that his chances of promotion were small. When, six years later, he brought out his second collection of songs, he anticipated the ministerial wrath by resigning his post altogether. Remember that his official position was never above that of a clerk on two or three thousand francs a-year, that he lived in his garret, that he associated with no great people, was not a lion, and begged of his friends only to let him lead his life in the shade. But it was not enough that the clerk should resign his post, they must also prosecute him. About this first prosecution, of which so much has been said, we need only remark that Béranger enjoyed his three months' incarceration

extremely. He had a warm and comfortable chamber in Sainte-Pélagie, instead of a draughty garret, he had sympathizing friends, he had the whole public of France on his side, he had an audience counted by hundreds of thousands, by millions. "It was calculated," he tells us, "that by the reproduction of the songs in the papers of Paris, copied by those of the departments and those abroad, there were sent abroad in the space of a fortnight many million copies of the verses that they wanted to interdict."

Some years later came out the volume containing the "Sacre de Charles le Simple," "Les Infiniment Petits," and the "Petit Homme Rouge." Another prosecution, and this time a fine of 10,000 francs with nine months in prison. The fine was easily paid; the prison, unfortunately, was not so easy to work out; but the poet, who was consoled by the visits of his friends—among others Lady Morgan—and by gifts of flowers and fruit, endured it and came out more embittered against Jesuits and the white cockade than ever.

The revolution of 1830 released him from any further prosecutions, and he was henceforth free to say and write whatever he pleased. In 1848 he was, against his will, elected representative of the department of the Seine by more than 200,000 votes. He protested, but in vain, and he took his seat, but a day or two afterwards he begged to be allowed to resign, and his prayer was granted. Then he retired to the obscurity he loved, and was seen no more.

I have said nothing of the man's inner and retired life, because one feels ashamed in lifting a curtain that the poor, proud poet, as bashful as any maiden, persisted in keeping down. Why should we pry and seek into those secrets of his life which do not illustrate his songs?

But of one romance so much has been said and so much written, that I must fain speak of it too. It is the story of Béranger's one and only love, quite a simple story. You may remember what he says of women in his Autobiography. "I have always regarded woman as neither a wife nor a mistress, which is too often to make of her either a slave or a tyrant, and I have never seen in her anything but a friend whom God has given us. The tenderness, full of esteem, with which women have inspired me from my youth, has never ceased to be the source of my sweetest consolations. Thus have I overcome a secret disposition to melancholy, the attacks of which became daily less frequent, thanks to women and poetry. Or let me say women alone, for my poetry comes from them." Here, you see, is not the roving disposition of Henry Murger in his "Bohemians." Nor, indeed, could Colonel Newcome himself speak more chivalrously.

Her name, mentioned above, was Judith Frère. She was two years older than Béranger, and of the same station in life. He made her acquaintance when she was eighteen and he sixteen, *i. e.* in the year 1796, an acquaintance which every year deepened more and more into the most perfect friendship that ever existed between man and woman. Was it love? Were they secretly married? We know nothing. But we may be sure that it was no ordinary tie that bound them together. The little clerk of the University, living in his garret on his petty salary, and that halved by the charities he daily practised, found one person in the world whom he could talk to, one in whom he could entirely trust, who gave him the sympathy that man can never get except from woman. It was to her rooms —she was but a simple *ouvrière*, with a pretty face, a

sweet voice, blue eyes, and brown hair—that Béranger, during those long years when he was unknown, a small, ungainly man, rough-featured, "chétif et laid," with bald head, and nothing handsome but his eyes, retreated secretly and found the chief refreshment of his soul—

> Grand Dieu! combien elle est jolie,
> Et moi je suis si laid, si laid.

She did not fetter him, she did not assert herself. As it would seem, she accepted the *rôle* of his friend, and acquiesced sadly in the seclusion that fâte had imposed, because we cannot doubt that Judith loved him as well as advised him.

> Lise à l'oreille
> Me conseille :
> Cet oracle me dit tout bas,
> Chantez, monsieur, n'écrivez pas.

Note that year after year passed by, that the unknown clerk became a great power in the land, but the name of Judith Frère was not heard. None of his friends—not Thiers, not Lamennais, not Manuel—knew anything about her. Then suddenly, in the evening of their lives, when she was fifty-seven and he was fifty-five, he brought her out into the sunshine, and placed her in his house. The wicked world pointed fingers of derision. Béranger wrote a letter to the Assemblée Nationale, claiming, with that quiet self-respect which always characterized him, the right of arranging his household in his own way, and, with no other word of explanation, went quietly on his own way. She was thus before the world his attached and honoured friend: she was more; she was his devoted and single-hearted servant, obedient to his slightest gesture—only he was not an imperious master—held in honour by those who were entitled to visit the poet, and happy in dying before her

husband, friend—what you will. Béranger told her to die first; and of course she obeyed him. It was a wish dictated from the kindest of hearts; he could not bear to think that she would have any unhappiness in surviving him. Let *him* bear the loneliness and the desolation.

She was the "Bonne Vieille." You know it—the sweetest and saddest of songs? It was written long before they did grow old together:—

Vous vieillirez, ô ma belle maîtresse!
Vous vieillirez, et je ne serai plus.
* * * *
Lorsque les yeux chercheront sous vos rides
Les traits charmants qui m'auront inspiré,
Des doux récits les jeunes gens avides
Diront, "Quel fut cet ami tant pleuré?"
De mon amour peignez, s'il est possible,
L'ardeur, l'ivresse, et même les soupçons;
Et bonne vieille au coin d'un feu paisible,
De votre ami répétez les chansons.

You see it was before he thought she would die first. Is it selfish, this desire of the poet's, to live a little longer in the heart of his mistress?—

Sans rougir vous direz, "Je l'aimais."

Perhaps all man's love is selfish. He wants a companion, he wants rest, and confidence. Béranger took without claiming it, but as a right, the devotion of a life.

He was a man of many friends, though he sought none. It was an honour to be his friend; it was also one of the greatest pleasures to talk with him when he expanded over the good wine that his healthy soul loved. He would sing his *chansons;* he would laugh and be merry, careful only that Judith was happy too, and that the old aunt, whose ill-humour was a sore trial, was kept as comfortable as a thorny temperament

would permit. Always thoughtful, too, about his friends. He would listen for hours to the philosophical theology of Lamennais, though he understood him no more than Lamb understood Coleridge. He remained faithful to his old Péronne folk. He never made an enemy or alienated a friend. His life was one long exercise of charity, and he had little moral mottoes of his own, small rules and maxims of life, copy-book texts, evolved from no reading, but from his own reflections, which turn up in his letters and his biography quite simply and naturally. "Quand on n'est pas égoïste," he says, for instance, "il faut être économe."

It may be remarked, as a national distinction of the French character, that while our rich men give their hundreds to hospitals and charitable societies—which pauperize; while our poor men give to each other and to barrel-organists; our middle classes—out of their innocent zeal—give to the missionaries, and all give of their abundance, the Frenchman, of whatever class, is himself, so far as he can be, his own almoner, and gives of his poverty. Béranger is no solitary example. It is a kind-hearted, generous, unselfish race, capable of sacrifice, ready to live on little, so that others may also live. And thus Béranger, through a long life of poverty, continually devoted half his income to those who had less than himself. When Christian, in Bunyan's story, drops his burden, made up, as you know, of his own iniquities, and nobody else's sins and sorrows, he goes along to the end light-hearted, free from encumbrance. Béranger, on the other hand, who is never conscious of any burden of iniquities, is always being saddled with other people's loads, one after another. It is his grandmother, his aunts, his sister, who get upon his back and cling round his neck. Then comes Judith, her little fortune all lost, then a

thousand poor people whose sufferings he must alleviate. Always some new unhappiness to relieve, some new burden to take up, some little luxury to be quietly put down. Take that case of Rouget de l'Isle, author of the "Marseillaise." He is starving; he is put into prison, this Tyrtæus, for a debt of twenty pounds. What does France care? There is a Bourbon with his troop of the *infiniment petits* on the throne, and the "Marseillaise" must be forgotten. Béranger finds out the poet. "Where are you?" he writes; "they would not tell me yesterday, then I was certain where you were; so I write to Sainte-Pélagie. Do not be ashamed of being in prison for a debt—it is for the nation to be ashamed. . . . Come, tell me all about it—*point d'enfantillage.*" Rouget is taken out of prison by Béranger. But he has no money. He will die. Not by a pistol or by poison, but he will wander about the fields till he drops dead. It is Béranger who goes after him, finds him in his aimless wanderings, brings him back to the friend who will look after him, and helps to keep him till Charles and his Jesuits are happily over the border for ever, and a pension can be got for the man who wrote the "Marseillaise."

It was not till 1857 that he died. His end was full of suffering. For many months the flame of life had been flickering in the socket, reviving for a little at midday, and sinking when the sun went down. His friends were gathered round him day after day, watching for the end to come, and all Paris was waiting to burst into tears at his death. He recovered a little strength to say farewell to Thiers, Villemain, and Cousin. "Adieu! my friends, adieu! Live on, you will have, even here, the better world. It is the will of God that men should cease to suffer so much. . . . *Il y est obligé.*" He

paused, then looked round and repeated his words. "*Obligé* est le mot," he said, sinking his head upon his breast. It was on the 16th of July, 1857, at half-past five in the afternoon, that he breathed his last, without any assistance from the priests, the greatest humourist, the most finished lyrical poet, the most tender-hearted friend, the simplest man that his country, that any country, has ever seen.

A little old man, without distinction at the first sight, unless one could penetrate his countenance with the divining glance of genius, so much of simplicity was there, with all its subtlety. He wore the dress of a rustic Alcinous, beneath which it was impossible to suspect his divinity in the midst of a crowd; shoes tied with a thong, coarse silk stockings, a clean cotton waistcoat, but a common one, open above his large chest, showing a shirt of linen, milk-white but coarse, such as country wives spin from their own hemp for the village wearer, a wrapper of grey cloth, the elbows of which showed the cord, while the unequal skirts let his legs be seen as he went along the road; and lastly, a wide-brimmed beaver, also grey, with no form, or worse than none, sometimes stuck across his head, sometimes heavily thrust forward on his brow, which gave play to a few sparse locks that fell about his face or on his coat collar. He used to go about with a white wood stick without head or ferule; not an old man's stick. He rarely leaned on it, but with the end of this holly branch would trace capricious figures on the floor, on the pavement, or on the sand. As to his features, they might have been made out with big strokes of the thumb in clay. There is the forehead, large and beetling, the blue protruding eyes, the coarse arched nose, the cheeks in strong relief, the thick lips, the chin with a dimple in it, the short muscular neck, the square-cut figure, the short legs. . . . But the forehead was so thoughtful, the eyes so transparent and penetrating, the nostrils breathed such enthusiasm, the cheeks were so modelled and their hollows so furrowed by thought and feeling, the mouth was so fine and loving, the smile so kindly, and on the lips irony and tenderness met. . . . As Alcibiades said of Socrates, "Something divine, while we knew it not, must have diffused itself over his countenance. Ugly as the man is, he is still the most beautiful of mortals."[1]

[1] Lamartine.

The *chansonnier* does not think: he is a mirror. The popular moods catch his imagination at points which vary with his age, his habits of life, his experience. Do not, therefore, with the critic, try to ascertain what Béranger thought and held; for of creed, opinion, faith, or doctrine, Béranger was incapable. His mind was as a field of waving canes, now flaunting their silver-grey plumage like the streamers of some holiday craft; now turning green and yellow leaves in flashing belts to meet the wind, now sad with the passing clouds, now all-glorious in the sun. But never still; never the same. For he was led by popular opinion; he was infected by a sentiment; he caught their unuttered sympathies in the looks of the people; as he wandered about the streets, he was able to read what they could not express. When he had seized the thoughts that floated in the air, he went home, and slowly, laboriously, carefully, gave them such shape and utterance as never yet were seen.

First, we get the love songs without a grain of politics. What does the young man care for politics? Then we have "Ma Grand'mère," "Le Petit Homme Gris," "Le Vieux Célibataire," "Jeannette," and all the tripping rhymes, armed each with the little arrow-point of malice:—

Tant qu'on le pourra, larirette,
On te damnera, larira.
Tant qu'on le pourra,
L'on trinqera,
Chantera,
Aimera
La fillette.
Tant qu'on pourra, larirette,
On te damnera, larira.

As the poet gets older the songs of mirth and mischief, whose charm is their entire absence of *prévoyance*, cease altogether, or change into songs of regret. On

this side Béranger is free from even the suspicion of morality. It is as if he would teach that the whole duty of youth is to get pleasure, of age to regret it. Only, as I said above, pray do not accuse Béranger of teaching, preaching, or holding any doctrine whatever.

To the second class of the *chansons* belong the political songs. The politics of Béranger are those of the people. When the Bourbons come back they are tired of war and fatigued with the anxieties that attend victories and defeats. After all, even a Bourbon may be good enough to bring tranquillity. Then Béranger sings:—

Louis, dit-on, fut sensible
Aux malheurs de ces guerriers
Dont l'hiver le plus terrible
A seul flétri les lauriers.

Presently, the people, accustomed to a generation of social equality, find themselves burdened once more with what they had taken so much pains to get rid of—the domination of priests and the insolences of an aristocracy. Then we have the famous "Marquis de Carabas."

Voyez ce vieux marquis
Nous traiter en peuple conquis;
Son coursier décharné
De loin chez nous l'a ramené.
Vers son vieux castel
Ce noble mortel
Marche en brandissant
Un sabre innocent.
Chapeau bas! chapeau bas!
Gloire au marquis de Carabas!

And to this period belong the "Révérends Pères," "Les Missionnaires," and "Les Infiniment Petits."

Tranquillity once re-established, and the priests and nobles back again, France began to contrast the empire with the monarchy. And then awoke again the idea of Napoleon, which meant, to all born since the revolution,

the country. This too would have died away with the next generation, but for the fact that Béranger caught the sentiment while yet it was young and powerless for good or evil, and gave it life, vigour, strength. Some of his best songs are those in which the great emperor is idealized :—

" Well, my dears, by kings attended,
Through the village street he passed
(I was then—the time goes fast—
But newly wed) ; the sight was splendid.
Up the hill and past the door,
Here he walked—it seems to-day—
He a little cocked hat wore,
And a coat of woollen grey.
I was frightened at his view ;
But he said, to calm my fear,
' Good day, my dear.' "
" Grandam ! did he speak to you ?
Did he speak to you ?" [1]

And you know the grand song of the " Le Vieux Caporal " singing on his way to be *fusillé* for striking one of his new officers :—

Qui là-bas sanglote et regarde ?
Eh ! c'est la veuve du tambour.
En Russie, à l'arrière-garde,
J'ai porté son fils nuit et jour.
Comme le père, enfant et femme
Sans moi restaient sous les frimas ;
Elle va prier pour mon âme :
Conscrits, au pas ;
Ne pleurez pas ;
Ne pleurez pas ;
Marchez au pas,
Au pas, au pas, au pas, au pas.

Morbleu ! ma pipe s'est éteinte ;
Non, pas encore. . . . Allons, tant mieux !
Nous allons entrer dans l'enceinte :
Ça, ne me bandez pas les yeux,

[1] From the translation by Robert Brough.

Mes amis . . . fâché de la peine ;
Surtout ne tirez point trop bas :
Et qu'au pays Dieu vous ramène !
Conscrits, au pas ;
Ne pleurez pas ;
Ne pleurez pas ;
Marchez au pas ;
Au pas, au pas, au pas, au pas.

Compare with these songs "Denys Maître d'École" and the "Dix-Mille Francs." Then think of the probable effect on a people, ever inclined to forget the misfortunes, and to dwell on the splendours, of the past; ever ready to see the ridiculous side of the present situation. Imperialism owes its revival to Béranger, unconsciously, perhaps, because he could not foresee, only interpret.

Lastly, let us consider one or two of the moral songs. That song is moral, in its way, which is prompted by sympathy with the sufferings and woes of our fellows. Béranger is tender-hearted; he gives out of his slender store more than he can spare; he sings out of the abundance of his love in pity and forgiveness. "Poor soul!" he says, "you suffer, let me help you as I can." No reprimand, no reproach, no advice for the future, no lament for the past, falls from the lips of this moralist. He sees nothing—always being a *chansonnier*—but the present. Past and future, cause and consequence, do not exist for him. Like the lark, he lives for the day, feels for the day. Jeanne la Rousse, with her three children, weeps for her husband the poacher, in prison—

Un enfant dort à sa mamelle,
Elle en porte un autre à son dos :
L'aîné, qu'elle traîne après elle,
Grèle pieds nus dans ses sabots.
Hélas, des gardes qu'il courrouce,
Au loin, le père est prisonnier.

Dieu, veillez sur Jeanne la Rousse:
On a surpris le braconnier.
* * * *
Pauvres enfants! chacun d'eux pousse,
Frais comme un bouton printanier.
Dieu, veillez sur Jeanne la Rousse:
On a surpris le braconnier.

That the poacher is a criminal is nothing; that his fate was to be expected is nothing; that the misery is deserved is nothing. He can only see the misery. And with that, he sees, like the people in all ages, the cruel injustice of sending a man to prison for knocking down a hare that crosses his road. By what right does any man claim the wild creatures as his own? Laws may be written down and expounded. You may teach people that they *may* not, you will never teach them that they *ought* not, to kill a partridge or a hare.

Next, it is an old vagabond who lies down in the ditch to die. That he has been always a man who would not work, that the miserable, squalid death is worthy of the miserable, squalid life, would involve a proposition in social economy too profound for the poet. He only sees the suffering.

Dans ce fossé cessons de vivre:
Je finis vieux, infirme et las.

Or it is the poor blind woman who kneels on the church steps in the cold, covered with rags, and begs. Is she an impostor? Is she a bad and worthless creature? Never mind: she is suffering.

Elle est aveugle, hélas! la pauvre femme:
Ah! faisons-lui la charité.

There is nothing so bad, we are told, as indiscriminate charity, and nothing so unreal as the glow of conscious virtue which follows the relief of some street impostor. Perhaps it might be urged, on the other

hand, that there are dangers in charity by machinery. Béranger has but one method: when he sees misery he relieves it. Misery is in itself, indeed, a harsh adviser. When it vanishes, the pain and shame of it linger still like the summer twilight. The lessons of affliction, the memory of degradation, may be used in two ways. They may degrade lower, or they may help to raise. Our sins may serve as stepping-stones to a higher level, or they may serve as millstones to drag us down. In either case Béranger would, if he were at hand, be ready to help and sympathize, with never a word of reproach or admonition, being, indeed, the good Samaritan of fallen and bleeding humanity, to whom our organized charities would fling by rule a coin wrapped in a tract. It may be that some of our English wretchedness would be more effectually relieved by some of the French sentiment.

It has always seemed to me that one of the most beautiful of Béranger's poems, and the most elevated in tone, is the "Étoiles qui filent." That is the reason why I have kept it to the last, and essayed a translation of my own.

"Thou sayest, shepherd, that a star
Shines in the skies my fate to guide."
"Yes, child, but in yon darkness far
Thick veils of night its glimmering hide."
"Shepherd, canst thou indeed divine
The secrets of the far-off spheres?
Then tell me what yon brilliant line
Means, as it shoots and disappears."

"Know, child, whene'er a mortal dies,
With him his star that moment falls—
This, amid young and laughing eyes,
While music echoed to the walls,
Fell stricken lifeless o'er the wine
Whose praises fired his dying ears."—
"See yet another star, whose line
One instant gleams, then disappears."

"Child, 'twas a star serene and bright,
The star of one as pure and fair.
A maiden blithe, a spirit light—
The wedding festival prepare:
Her virgin brow with orange twine:
Ring, wedding bells; weep, happy tears—"
"See, see, another shooting life,
That gleams and shines, and disappears."

* * * *

"Weep, weep, my child, such stars are rare.
He gave his wealth to feed the poor.
They glean from others' store, but there
They reaped a harvest great and sure.
When o'er the waste those home-lights shine,
The wanderer forgets his fears."—
"See, see, another gleaming line
That shoots across and disappears."

"Yes, 'tis the star of some great king.
Go child, thy early virtue keep.
Let not thy star its glories fling
To wake men's envy from its sleep.
With steady light burn clear and far;
So at the end look not to hear,
'Tis but another shooting star—
They shoot and gleam and disappear."

Béranger sums up the poetry of the *esprit gaulois*. In him is the gaiety of the *trouvères*, the malice of the *fabliaux*, the *bonhomie* of La Fontaine, the clearness of Marot, the *bonne manière* of Villon, the sense of Regnier. Something, at first inexplicable, there is which we miss in him. I have discovered what that is: we look to be led, and everywhere we find him following. Where the crowd is thickest, there is Béranger; where the tide is flowing, thither drifts his bark with all the rest; amid the crowd we find their prophet; we look for the voice of a man and we hear the voice of the multitude.

The *chansonnier*, above all artists, depends for success on the emotions and sympathies evoked by his subject, over and above the art with which he has treated it.

In general he would deprecate a too careful criticism. Béranger, however, would seem to invite it; for his art is perfect. The tears, the laughter, the sympathies of his songs, are in the words and the rhythm as well as in the subject. Here is no rude sculptor who depends upon the pathos of the theme, but one who, self-taught, has mastered the profoundest rules of art—a poet after the heart of Pedant Boileau, who has yet never read the "Art Poétique."

One after the other, we have seen these French poets and humourists harping on the single strain of wasting life and coming death. Truly, they are in this respect as sad and hopeless as the Preacher:—"This is one evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all. . . . To him that is joined to all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion; for the living know that they shall die; but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward; the memory of them is forgotten; their love, their hatred, their envy, is now perished, neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun."

The stern Israelite laments the loss of his hatred and his envy, but it is not either of these that the light-hearted Frenchman regrets; it is his youth and his love. "Le temps que je regrette, c'est le temps qui n'est plus." And even Ronsard, breaking for once into a natural strain, sings with the rest:—

> Ma douce jouvence est passée:
> Adieu, ma lyre; adieu, fillettes,
> Jadis mes douces amourettes!
> Là! je n'ai plus en mon déclin
> Que le feu, le lict et le vin.

This intense love of life is a key-note—I struck it in

the first page—to all the French poetry, even that, outside my limits, where we might look to find what we are accustomed to call loftier aims. It seems to me that there can be nothing loftier than to labour and feel for others; nothing more noble than, like Béranger, to sympathize with the world; like Rabelais, to cultivate the world; like Molière, to remove the prejudices of the world; and with all this, nothing more in accordance with nature than to look on with sadness as the sunlit days slip faster and faster from our hands, as the twilight follows the dawn ever more rapidly, as the winters still more swiftly tear down the summers, as the river rushes ever faster to the fall.

And which of us, pray, does not feel this sadness? What religion, what philosophy, what faith was ever yet sufficient to make us grow old without regret, or contemplate death and separation with satisfaction? We in England, less natural than the French, have agreed not to harp upon this great human sorrow, or at least to strike the chord of regret indirectly, "in thinking of the days that are no more." But to live the simple and self-denying life of Béranger, to work, save, spare for others, to grow old in well-doing, and then, when the shadows gather which precede the night, to lie down with a sigh for the world we have found so full of love, and die, leaving the rest to the *bon Dieu*, proud, perhaps, like Boileau, that we have done no wrong, and helped on the world—is not this the course of a good man? It is, perhaps, a Pagan doctrine—one is astonished at times in considering how many Paganisms still prevail—but it has no lower an authority than the author of Ecclesiastes. On the other hand, it is not the Paganism of Art, selfish in its cold and passionless abstraction, or still more selfish in its desire to wring for itself, at any

cost, from every passing moment, the utmost possible of passion, rapture, and delight.

And so my humourists are all alike. Every one, like Montaigne, might serve as a book of "Hours" for a Ninon de l'Enclos; in the face of every one the light clear eye that brightens for a pretty girl, for a song, for a feast, for spring-time and flowers, for a *bon-mot*, for an *espiéglerie*. We may see in all of them the same resolution to let others solve the insoluble, peering into that impenetrable blackness which lies between and beyond the stars; we may recognize in all the same nimbleness of wit, the same marvellous dexterity of language. And see how kind and tender-hearted they all are; shut your eyes to some of their faults—indeed, I have hidden them as much as I could—and own the virtues of generosity, elasticity, and self-denial. I have carefully abstained from instituting comparisons, but it remains now to claim, in the briefest manner, what may very possibly be disputed, superiority for the French over the English humourists. Rabelais has, I maintain, a finer wit than Swift; we have no political satire so good as the "Satyre Ménippée;" we have no early English humour comparable for a moment with that of the *fabliaux;* we have no letter-writer like Voiture; we have no teller of tales like La Fontaine; and, lastly, we have no *chansonnier* like Béranger.

THE END.

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